

Vincent's Cove in the 1870s, A Pictorial Record of Gloucester Shipbuilding

BY ERIK A.R. RONNBERG, JR.

This essay by Erik A.R. Ronnberg, Jr., won the first prize in the Nautical Research Guild's 1996 Essay Contest. We are pleased to publish this study of shipbuilding as interpreted from two wonderful visual records — a photograph and a painting — created by masters in their respective fields. — Ed.

THE DECADE FOLLOWING the Civil War saw the port of Gloucester, Massachusetts, rise from a long decline in the foreign trade to become the most important fishing port in the United States. This was attended by improved railroad connections and steamship service with Boston, which not only facilitated the distribution of fish and fish products, but attracted visitors to the Cape Ann region to enjoy its coastal scenery and picturesque harbors. Artists working in, or traveling to, the Boston area were well aware of Gloucester's attractions and the ready access to them. Some would make only brief visits; others stayed for lengthy periods and often became residents. In the early 1870s, Winslow Homer stayed long enough to paint an enduring image of shipbuilding in Gloucester harbor; three years later, a resident photographer, William A. Elwell, would record similar activity on the same site. These two images have been studied and compared, raising questions which have led to far more answers and historical insight than either could on its own.

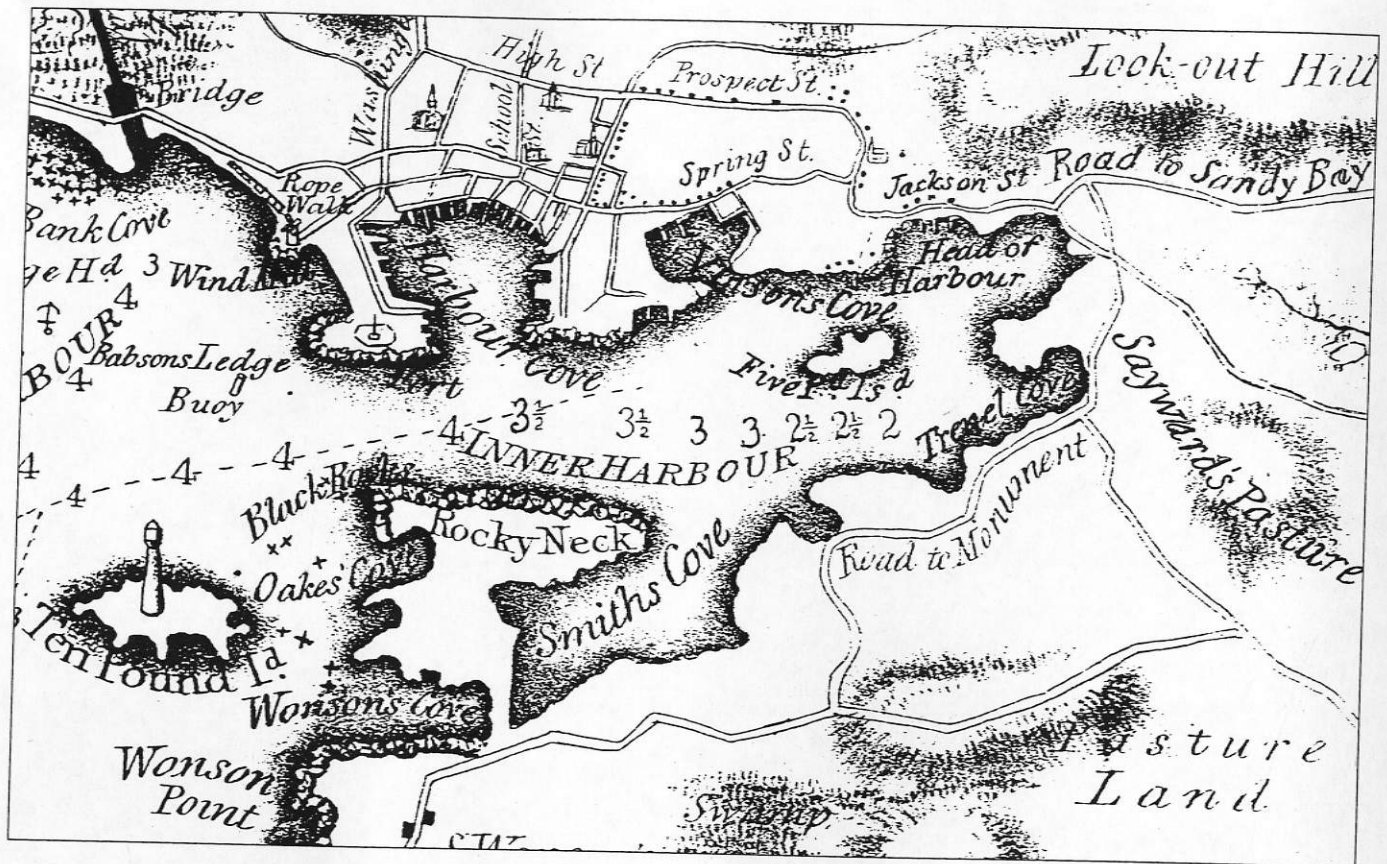
The setting for these pictures is Vincent's Cove, a small inlet on the north-west side of Gloucester Harbor (Figures 1 and 2), whose tidal basin attracted a varied cluster of maritime trades and facilities around its shore. While only a mud flat at low tide, many of the businesses abutting it were of a nature that transport of goods to and from them by water could take its time and wait for the tides. By contrast, the bustling fish and freighting piers fronting deeper harbor bottoms had to be accessible at all times to deep-laden fishing schooners and cargo vessels. Immune to that traffic, the inner reaches of

Vincent's Cove were bounded by shipyards, a spar-maker's shop, a rigging loft, an anchor works, and a wood and coal dealer. The variety of trades and the pace of their waterborne activities lent the cove a vitality and character that differed from those of its neighboring wharves and fish-processing facilities.¹ Scenically, Vincent's Cove stood apart from the rest of Gloucester Harbor as Gloucester stood apart from its adjoining coastlines. This quality of a world-within-a-world proved irresistible to a host of painters and photographers.

History has been unkind to William Vinson, one of the first permanent settlers of Gloucester at the time it was set off from the township of Ipswich in 1641. He was the original grantee of Five Pound Island (now totally obliterated by a massive state fish pier) and he owned land surrounding the cove which then bore his name. In time, Vinson's Cove was re-named Ellery's Cove for a subsequent settler; later, it was called Spring Cove for the fresh water spring which flowed into it. By the early nineteenth century, the cove was re-named for its first owner, but, after the 1830s, the name had been corrupted to Vincent Cove, or Vincent's Cove, and remained so-misspelled for the rest of its existence.² Twenti-

¹ A lively description of Gloucester's waterfront and its many changes is found in Joseph E. Garland, *The Gloucester Guide: A Retrospective Ramble* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: 1973), pp. 113-129. Particulars on Vincent's Cove are on pp. 116-121.

² John J. Babson, *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann* (Gloucester: 1860, 1972), pp. 84, 174, and ———, *Notes and Additions to the History of Gloucester, Second Series* (Salem, Massachusetts: 1891), p. 116. John Mason's *Map of Gloucester, Cape Ann* (Boston: 1831) is the last published map of the Cape Ann region on which the cove is spelled "Vinson's Cove" (see Figure 1).



eth-century encroachments led to its complete filling by 1945, but the land thus created served as little more than a gravel- and weed-topped vacant lot until the 1960s, when the blight of urban renewal covered it with a re-routed waterfront street, two parking lots, and a truck depot serving a huge fish freezing plant. Nowhere on any street sign or memorial tablet has William Vinson or his cove been remembered.

There are many shallows in Gloucester Harbor, but in only a few places does the shore have a long unobstructed slope suitable for shipbuilding. Three such locations were usurped for use as marine railways, which are repair facilities and thus too costly and far too busy to be used for building ships.³ The remaining sites were at Head of the Harbor and in Vincent's Cove (Figure 1), both being notable for their difficult confines and accessibility only at high tide (Figure 2). For launching a partially finished hull which was never to return, these conditions were adequate though far from ideal, but adequacy was all that mattered to the ship-

wrights. By 1873, Vincent's Cove had become the site of two, possibly three, shipyards and was to remain the center of shipbuilding activity in Gloucester until 1912.⁴

The physiography of Gloucester Harbor is very distinctive, coupled with its wharves and buildings, it is absolutely unique. Each segment of the shoreline, with its own peculiar array of structures, has a recognizable character which cannot be confused with any other seaport. This was as true of the Gloucester which Homer saw in the 1870s as it was of the Gloucester depicted by Fitz Hugh Lane some ten to forty years earlier.

The fishing schooners of Gloucester were likewise unique in their hull forms and proportions. The 1870s saw the proliferation of a schooner type known as the *clipper* which had a graceful hull with sharp ends, a rather wide beam, and a shallow bottom suited to the limited depths of water around most piers in Gloucester. The clipper schooners were fast but dangerous; once heeled beyond a certain angle, they lacked the stability to right themselves and would capsize

³ Joseph Santapaola, Gloucester, Massachusetts, personal communications, 1993. A former owner and operator of two of Gloucester's marine railways, Santapaola described at length the topographic requirements for these facilities and gave many insights to the economics of their operation.

⁴ Sampson, Davenport, & Co., *The Gloucester & Rockport Directory, 1873* (Boston and Gloucester: 1873). D.A. Story and Bishop Brothers are listed with their business addresses at Vincent's Cove.

Figure 1, opposite page. Gloucester Harbor, detail from John Mason's MAP OF GLOUCESTER, CAPE ANN (Boston: 1831). Vinson's Cove and Head of Harbor are clearly indicated on the north-east end of the Inner Harbor. Author's Collection.

Figure 2, below. Gloucester Harbor, detail of Sketch 7, "Preliminary Chart of Gloucester Harbor, Massachusetts," in REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE COAST SURVEY, 1854 (Washington, DC: 1855). The arrow indicates the mouth of Vincent's Cove, whose basin is stippled to indicate that it was completely in the tidal zone (that is, dry at low tide) at the time the hydrography was done (1853). Author's collection.

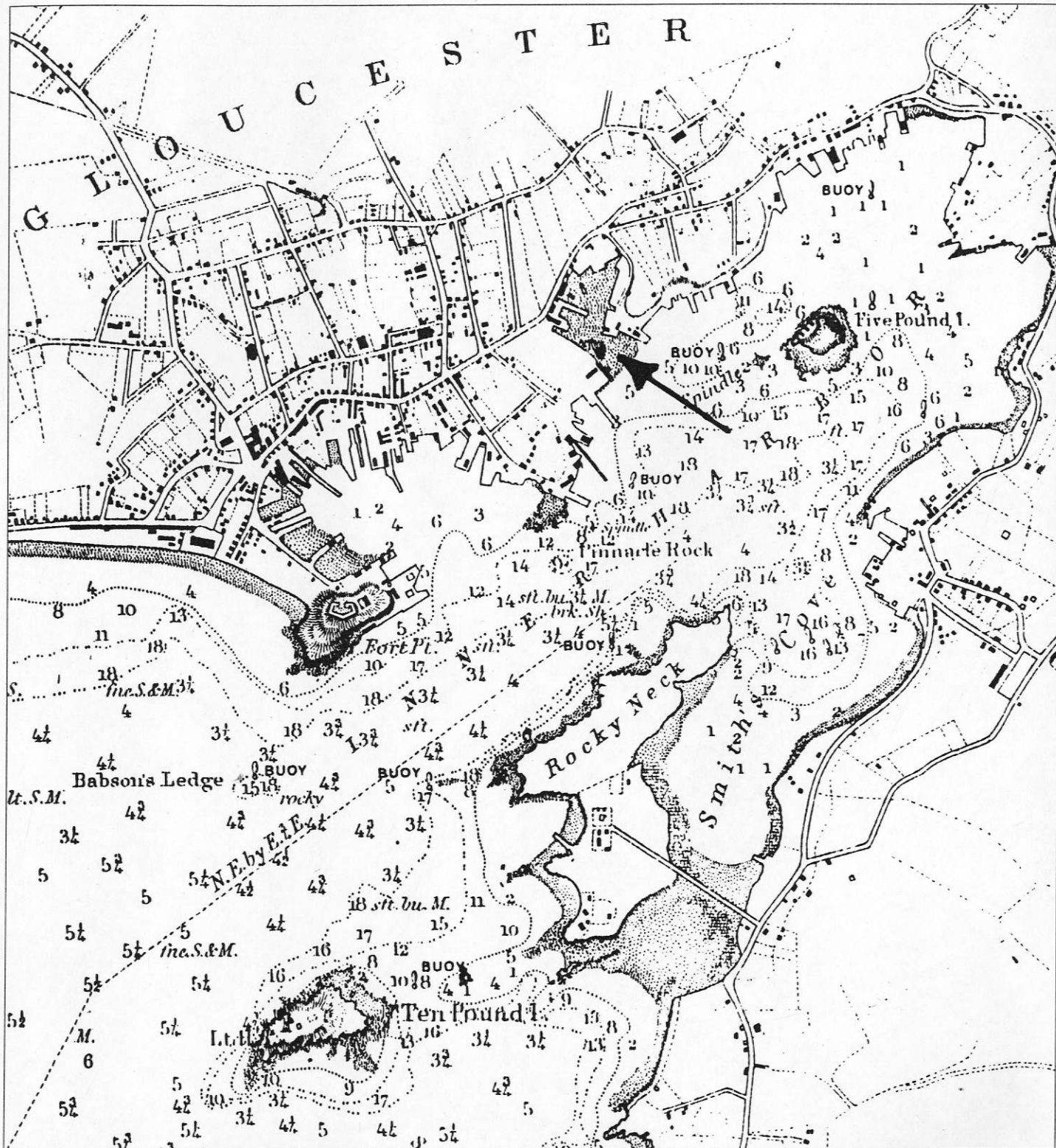




Figure 3. Winslow Homer's oil painting *SHIPBUILDING AT GLOUCESTER*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 13-1/2 inches x 19-3/4 inches. Smith College Museum of Art, Northhampton, Massachusetts.

and sink.⁵ The year 1871 saw the loss of nineteen such vessels and 140 men,⁶ but two decades would pass before a concerted effort was made to eliminate fishing schooners of this hazard-prone design.⁷

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Winslow Homer's oil-on-canvas painting *Shipbuilding at Gloucester* (Figure 3) is one of the earliest depictions in any artistic medium of such activity in this port and one of the earliest depictions of a clipper fishing schooner. The locale in the title has been the subject of some controversy because the painting's date precedes by two years Homer's first documented visit to Gloucester. This paradox has been explained away as a mis-titling of the work, which may have depicted a shipyard in some other port, or

a wholly fictitious setting whose elements had been culled from the artist's memory or imagination. Some scholars have carelessly deduced that Gloucester had no shipyards in that period, leaving all of that work to shipyards in nearby Essex.⁸ It is true that most of Gloucester's fishing schooners were built at Essex shipyards, but nothing could be farther from the truth than the supposition that shipbuilding had ceased in Gloucester in the second half of the nineteenth century.

A photograph of Vincent's Cove taken by William A. Elwell in 1874 (Figure 4) illustrates perfectly Gloucester's distinctive combination of topography, buildings, and vessels. The hull under construction in the foreground is the large clipper schooner *Grace L. Fears* in the shipyard of David Alfred Story.⁹ In the distance rises the granite shield of East Gloucester-

⁵ Howard I. Chapelle, *The American Fishing Schooners* (New York: 1973), pp. 107, 134, 135.

⁶ George H. Procter, *The Fishermen's Memorial and Record Book* (Gloucester: 1873), pp. 44-47, 53.

⁷ Chapelle, *Fishing Schooners*, p. 176.

⁸ D. Scott Atkinson, "Hymns to an Older America," in Sue Taylor, editor, *Winslow Homer in Gloucester 1873* (Chicago: 1990), p. 24.

⁹ Gordon W. Thomas, *Fast & Able* (Gloucester: 1973), pp. 1, 2. Thomas' historical discussion of schooner *Grace L. Fears* includes the first published commentary on Elwell's photograph.

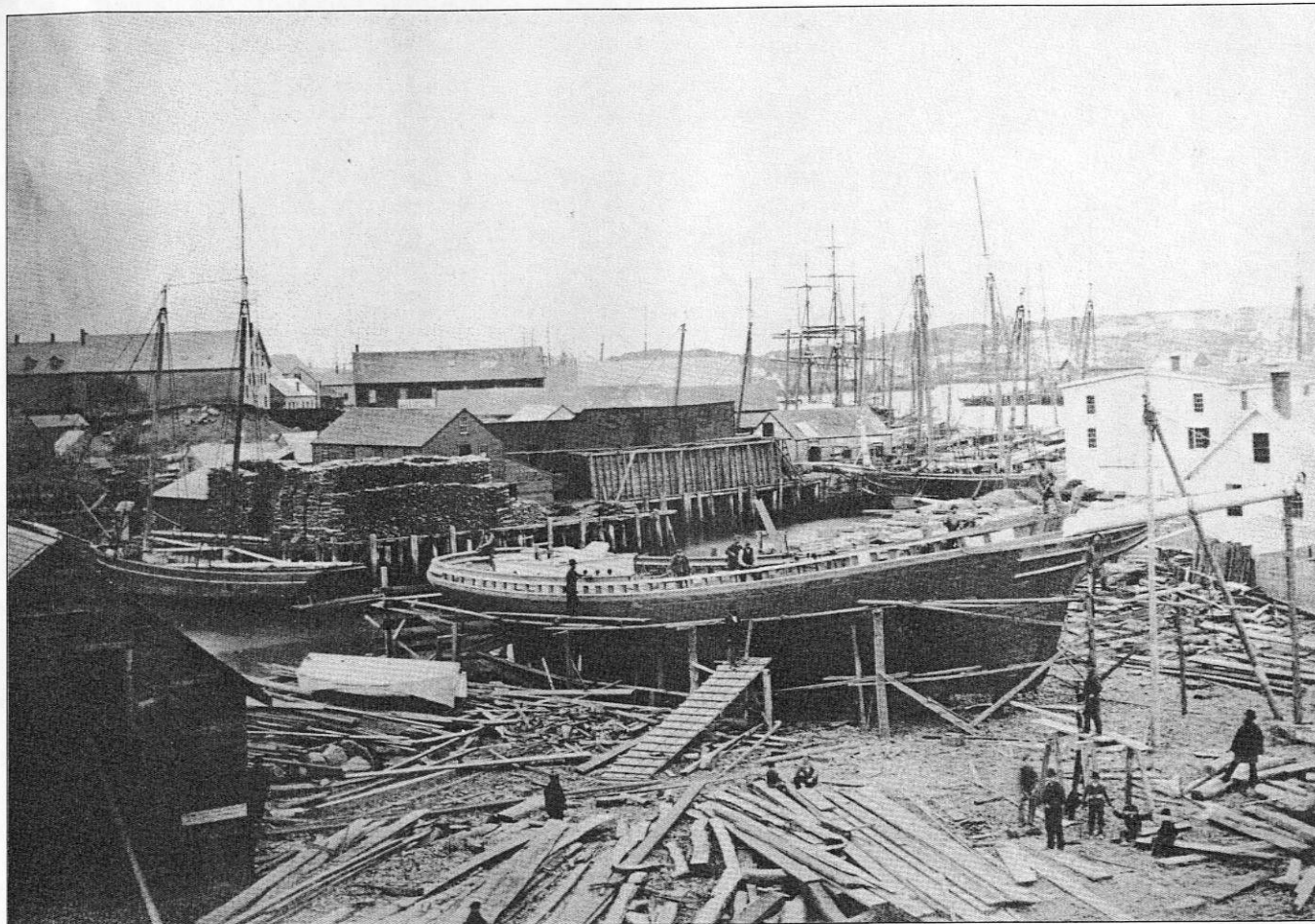
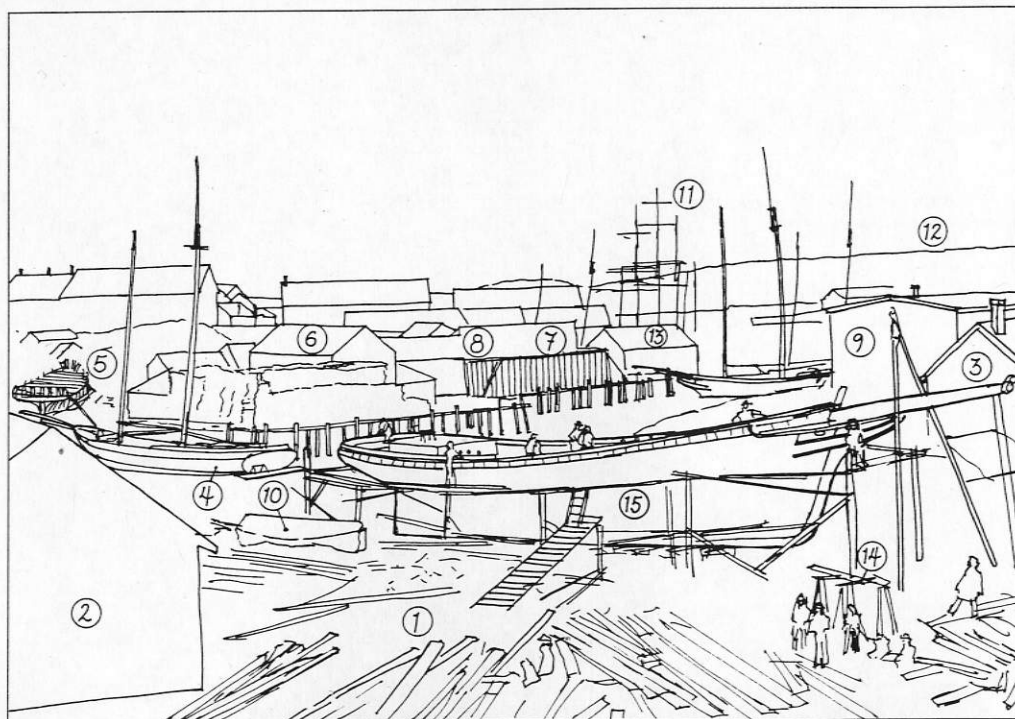


Figure 4, above. William A. Elwell's photograph "Shipbuilding. Fishing Schooner on the Stocks at Vincent's Cove," the fifth image in an album of albumen prints titled *GLOUCESTER*, 1876. 10-1/2 inches x 14 inches. From a copy negative in author's collection.

KEY TO FIGURE 4

1. David Alfred Story shipyard
2. Stable — David M. Hilton
3. Office — Dennis & Ayer
4. Fishing schooner *DELIA MARIA*
5. Shipyard — Bishop Brothers(!)
6. Wharf shed, cordwood piles — William H. Friend
7. Coal pocket — W.H. Friend
8. Sparmaker's sign — Joseph Call
9. Wharf shed — Benjamin Low
10. Catboat
11. Masts of salt bark
12. East Gloucester skyline
13. Wharf shed — Samuel Lane
14. Pit saw and saw horses — Story shipyard
15. Schooner *GRACE L. FEARS* under construction



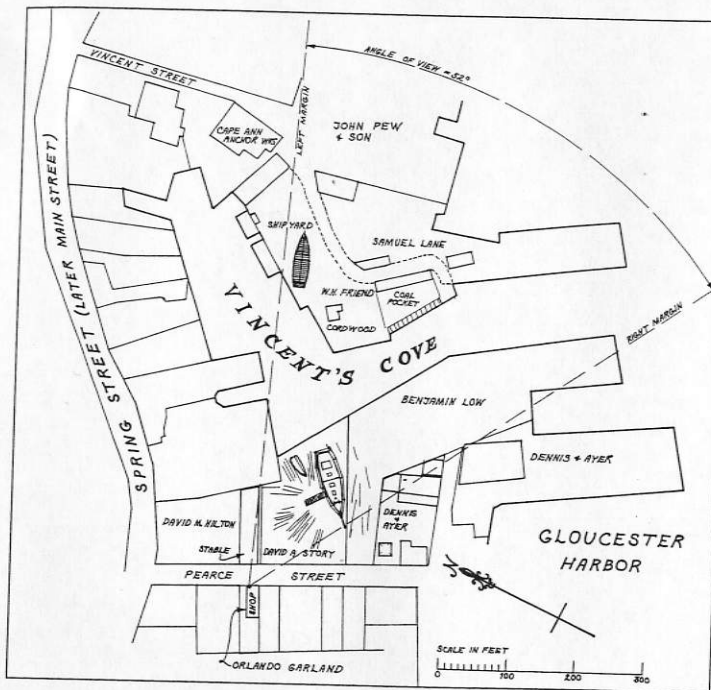


Figure 5. Vincent's Cove, about 1873. Reconstruction by the author from sources cited in text. See footnote 11.

ter which protects Gloucester Harbor from the buffeting of easterly storms and Atlantic swells. Part of a large album of photographs published by Elwell in 1876 to celebrate the City of Gloucester during the nation's centennial,¹⁰ this view is arguably the finest in the collection. Winslow Homer would certainly have agreed; his painting *Shipbuilding at Gloucester* depicts the very same location.

Elwell's photograph looks due east from a high vantage point and takes in the southern end of Vincent's Cove which opens into Gloucester Harbor. By comparing this view with old city maps, then aligning buildings and land features which appear in the right and left margins, the camera's angle of view can be reconstructed and its position pinpointed.¹¹ The only vantage point which could have offered this view was on the second floor of Orlando Garland's carpentry shop at 11 Pearce Street (Figure 5). The albumen print, measuring 10-1/2 by 14 inches, was probably contact-printed from a glass plate negative of 11- by 14-inch format (or larger, if allowance is made for trim-

ming). For a camera of this format, a lens of approximately 15-inch focal length would have been used.¹²

At the time this photograph was taken, David Alfred Story was the sole proprietor of his shipbuilding business (Figure 6) and probably the sole owner of his shipyard site at 10-14 Pearce Street.¹³ Prior to the fall of 1869, he had a partner, Andrew J. Frisbee, the business then being known as Frisbee & Story. After the partnership was dissolved, Frisbee built ships at another site (not presently known, but possibly also in Vincent's Cove) until 1873, when his name disappeared from city records.¹⁴

Most of the surrounding properties in this photograph have been identified as to their owners (Figure 5).¹⁵ At the lower left margin, bounding the north side of Story's shipyard, is one of the horse stables of David M. Hilton. At the lower right margin is the office building of fishing firm Dennis & Ayer and beyond is a wharf shed belonging to Benjamin Low (of the fishing firm David Low & Co.). On the opposite side of the cove, most of the land and buildings were owned by William H. Friend, whose coal and firewood business is evidenced by the great piles of cordwood and a coal pocket. Behind the coal pocket is a large sign advertising spars. Sparmaker Joseph Call occupied the building, while rigger Moses Merlet had a rigging loft on the John Pew & Son Wharf, at the periphery of the cove's eastern extremity (Figures 5 and 7).¹⁶

Barely visible at the extreme left margin is a schooner under construction on the lots designated 29-33 Vincent Street (Figure 8). The builder has not been identified, but may have been the Bishop Brothers, John and Robert (Figure 7).¹⁷ This site would become the last in Gloucester to be used for shipbuilding; John Bishop built ships on it until 1911, when he retired.¹⁸ If the brothers were working at this site in 1874, this is the earliest known photographic record of their activity.

¹⁰ William A. Elwell, *Gloucester, 1876* (Gloucester: n.d.), fifth photograph (unpaginated).

¹¹ G.M. Hopkins, CE, *Atlas of the City of Gloucester and Town of Rockport, Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: 1884), Plate 4. City of Gloucester, street lists, 1878. Manuscript sheets in Gloucester Archives Committee, Catalog: CC29, CCBV #3, Box 58, Folios: Main Street (Pearce Street to Vincent Street; Ward 2 (Vincent Street); Ward 3 (Pearce Street). Sampson, Davenport, & Co., *Directory, 1873*. An outline of Vincent's Cove (Figure 5) was traced from Hopkins, Atlas, Plate 4. Properties of interest therein were checked against the 1878 street lists to determine previous owners, then traced back to 1873, using the Sampson, Davenport *Directory*.

¹² Eastman Kodak Company, *Kodak Professional Photoguide* (Rochester: 1977), p. 28, table: "Lens Focal Length." This table lacks a data column for the 11- by 14-inch format; the 5- by 7-inch format column was used and the determined lens focal length was doubled.

¹³ Procter, *Fishermen's Own Book*, D.A. Story advertisement in the unpaginated advertising section.

¹⁴ Vessel construction and launchings by Frisbee & Story were regularly reported in the *Cape Ann Weekly Advertiser* until the late fall of 1869, when the partnership was reported as dissolved. Story's activity was regularly reported thereafter.

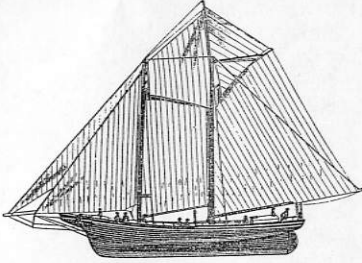
¹⁵ See Note 11.

¹⁶ Sampson, Davenport, & Co., *Directory, 1873*, pp. 27, 84, 249, 246.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 249.


¹⁸ Thomas, *Fast & Able*, p. 121.

D. A. STORY,
Vessel Builder & Repairer,




Shipyard on Pearce St., GLOUCESTER, Mass.

D. A. STORY,
Vessel Builder & Repairer,



Shipyard on Pearce Street,
GLOUCESTER, Mass.

D. A. STORY,
Vessel Builder and Repairer,



Shipyard on Pearce Street, Gloucester, Mass.

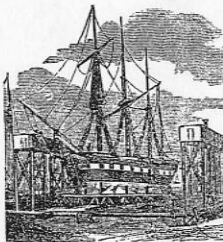
256 GLOUCESTER DIRECTORY

MOSES MERLET,
RIGGER & MAST-SETTER,
VINCENT'S POINT,
Near the Wharf of John Few & Son,
GLOUCESTER, - - - MASS.



TARRING RIGGING, AND PLANING
MASTS, done at short notice.
Stock of all kinds furnished. If required.

MOSES MERLET,
Rigger and Mast-Setter,
Left on the Wharf of John Few & Son, GLOUCESTER, MASS.



TARRING RIGGING,
- AND -
PLANING MASTS,
done at short notice.
SECOND - HAND RIGGING
- AND -
Red Stock of all kinds.
STOCK FURNISHED
If required.
Good warranted work and
low prices.

BISHOP BROS.,
SHIPWRIGHTS,
Boats and Dories repaired.
Vessel Work in all its
branches done with neat-
ness and despatch.
SHOP,
Vincent's Point, - Gloucester.

JOSEPH C. CALL,
DEALER IN
SPARS,
Pumps and Blocks,
SHOP ON VINCENT'S POINT,
Gloucester, Mass.
Near Cape Ann Anchor Works.

Figure 6, far left. Advertisements for David Alfred Story's shipyard which appeared in, top, Procter, *THE FISHERIES OF GLOUCESTER*, 1876 and, middle, the Gloucester edition and, bottom, the Boston edition of Procter, *THE FISHERMEN'S MEMORIAL AND RECORD BOOK*, 1873. Author's collection.

Figure 7, center. Advertisements for Moses Merlet's rigging loft in, top, Sampson, Davenport, & Co., *THE GLOUCESTER AND ROCKPORT DIRECTORY*, 1873 and, middle, the Boston edition of Procter, *THE FISHERMEN'S MEMORIAL AND RECORD BOOK*, 1873. Advertisements, bottom, for the Bishop Brothers' shipyard and Joseph Call's spar yard in Sampson, Davenport, *THE GLOUCESTER AND ROCKPORT DIRECTORY*. Author's collection.

Figure 8, below. Detail of Figure 4. A vessel in frame is barely visible over the light-colored portion of the foreground building's roof.



The schooner lying at Friend's Wharf is *Delia Maria*, a small fishing vessel of 55.75 tons, built at Essex in 1864 for Dennis & Ayer.¹⁹ A float and sawhorse under her stern indicate minor repairs are in progress. The schooners clustered at the mouth of the cove cannot be identified, but they are mostly fishermen of the clipper model. The two tall masts with yards and a third shorter mast without them belong to a bark, one of the many salt barks which routinely brought salt to Gloucester to satisfy an unending demand for this all-important ingredient in fish curing.²⁰

Framed by all this activity, *Grace L. Fears* is nearing completion. Launched on 2 July 1874, she was larger, at 84 tons, than most of her predecessors built at this yard, but was otherwise the same in hull form and general features.²¹ She is ringed by scaffolding as her builders are planking the bulwarks, planing the rails smooth, and finishing the carved details on the beakhead. The bowsprit has just been maneuvered into place, using a

pair of wooden sheer legs which still straddles the massive spar. The hull has been painted up to the level of the decks; the large trunk cabin and other deck furniture have been painted the customary white.

Around the shipyard lie piles of heavy curved oak timbers for frames and rough-sawn boards for hull planking. Massive planks of white oak and yellow pine, 2 to 3 inches thick when adzed smooth, were for the hull bottom; narrower, lighter planks of New England white pine were for the decks and bulwarks. In the lower right corner are two large saw horses, traversed by planks, atop which stands the sawyer to guide his pit saw, a two-man hand saw which got its name from its original use over a pit. Before there were powered band saws for milling lumber, all ships' planks were sawn to width and thickness in this tedious way. Leading up to the hull is a gangboard for bringing large planks into place on the hull for fitting and fastening.

Below *Grace L. Fears'* stern, atop a pile of trash wood, is the covered hull of a catboat, a type used mostly for pleasure sailing in the Cape Ann region. Catboats were a specialty of the Higgins & Gifford boat shop whose proprietors, both natives of the Cape Cod and Buzzards Bay region, had recently

¹⁹ John S.E. Rogers, *List of Vessels Belonging to the District of Gloucester, August, 1870* (Gloucester: 1870), p. 6.

²⁰ Gordon W. Thomas, *Wharf and Fleet* (Gloucester: 1977), pp. 6, 7 (unpaginated).

²¹ Thomas, *Fast & Able*, p. 1, and Chapelle, *Fishing Schooners*, pp. 125, 128, 129.

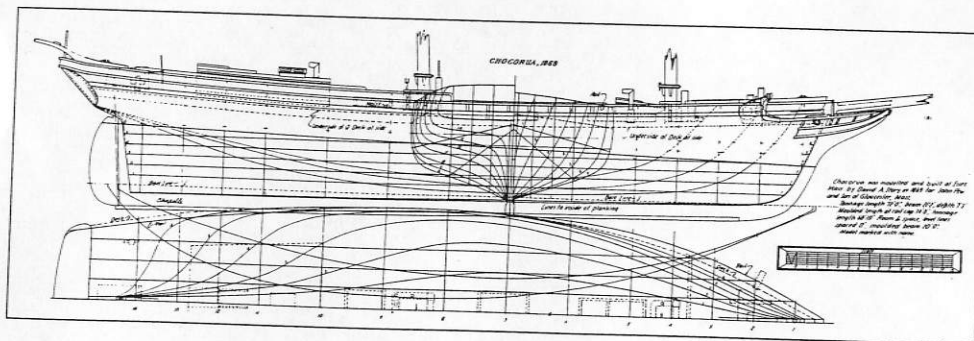


Figure 9. Hull plan of fishing schooner *CHOCORUA*, 1869, drawn by Howard I. Chapelle, date unknown, and published in *THE NATIONAL WATERCRAFT COLLECTION, SECOND EDITION (1976)*. Courtesy The Smithsonian Institution, NMAH/Transportation.

moved to Gloucester. They knew catboats well and adapted the rig to suit local needs.²² Homer would immortalize this local variant of the type in his most famous painting, *Breezing Up*, 1876.

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When Elwell's photograph is compared with Homer's painting, the similarities are so striking that the intervention of three years and minor evidence of artistic license in the painting do little to diminish them. The fields of view and viewpoints differ only by degree — Elwell chose a higher, more distant vantage point, whereas Homer set up his easel at ground level on the shipyard site itself. In both the painting and the photograph, piles of lumber use perspective to direct very forcefully the viewer's eye to the schooners' hulls. The buildings in the painting's background match closely the lumber shed on W.H. Friend's wharf at left and the buildings of Dennis & Ayer at right. Where buildings might have created a background visually confusing to the schooner's profile, Homer simply omitted them, or painted them out, leaving the stem and stern to stand out against the sky.

It is useful for this comparison that Homer depicted his schooner at nearly the same stage of construction as *Grace L. Fears* in Elwell's photograph. The hull is planked, leaving only the bulwarks to be covered. The bowsprit is in place, but the carvings on the beakhead below it have not been made. The three men on the scaffolding amidships are at work on the hull planking; the one at left is dubbing (fairing the rough surface with an adze) while the two at his right are driving open a tight plank seam in preparation for caulking.²³ At the vessel's forefoot, a man is painting the bottom planks with copper antifouling paint, whose color was a dark brown. The alternating dark and light planks are explicable only as artistic license; Homer appar-

ently wanted to bring out the gracefully-rising sweeps of the plank seams.

Below the scaffolding, to the right of the gangboard, a man in a stooped posture is shaping the schooner's rudder with a adze.²⁴ In the middle ground near the left margin, another is sorting through a pile of oak timbers which will become the frames of another vessel. The foreground is occupied by heavy fitches of oak plank, their gnarled edges still covered with bark. The effect of perspective in these lumber piles creates strong visual guides which point insistently toward the vessel; however, there is no license in what Homer has done here. The very same thing is seen in Elwell's photograph.

There were other shipyards in Gloucester besides Story's — indeed, there was one, perhaps two, which operated at times in other parts of Vincent's Cove. None could have offered the combination of topography and surrounding buildings which we see in Homer's canvas. There is no doubt in this writer's mind that this painting represents the David Alfred Story shipyard at 10-14 Pearce Street in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

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If we can be satisfied with the location and accept 1871 as the year Homer finished the painting, there is hope, if not certainty, of identifying the vessel under construction. In early March of that year, Story launched a vessel, reportedly of 100 tons (probably much less than that; pre-launch estimates of tonnage were usually exaggerated) for Provincetown, Massachusetts, owners. Newspaper accounts did not give the vessel's name.²⁵ The yard seems to have been idle for the balance of the year and only one other was reported to have built a vessel in 1871.²⁶ On this evidence, it is unlikely that Homer began this painting in that year. For the Provincetown schooner to be the subject, the painting would have had to be done in mid-February to capture that stage of the vessel's construction. Weather condi-

²² Higgins & Gifford, *New Catalogue* (Gloucester: n.d., about 1893), pp. 16, 17.

²³ Dana A. Story, *The Building of a Wooden Ship* (Barre, Massachusetts: 1971), unpaginated.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Cape Ann Weekly Advertiser*, 3 March 1871, p. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 31 March 1871, p. 2, and 19 June 1871, p. 2.

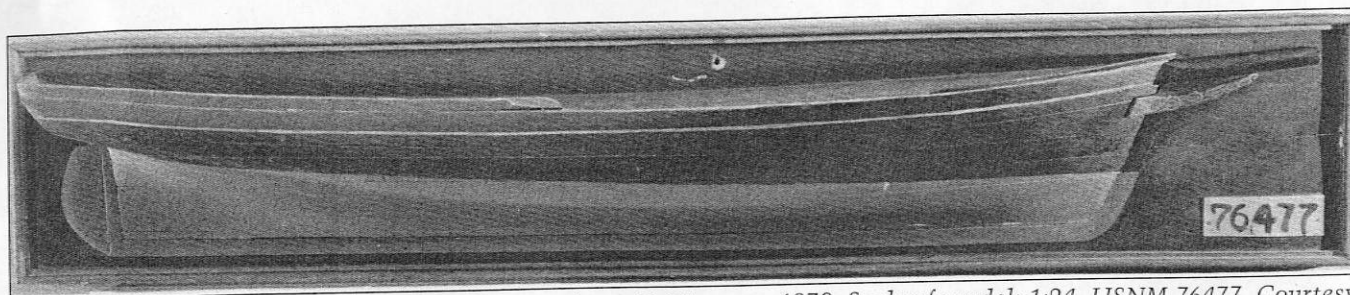


Figure 10. Builder's half-model, fishing schooner ALICE G. WONSON, 1870. Scale of model: 1:24. USNM 76477. Courtesy The Smithsonian Institution, NMAH/Transportation.

tions at that time of year are seldom conducive to outdoor sketching and painting, nor do they offer the warm summer light which Homer so effectively conveyed.

The years 1869 and 1870 were much more accommodating for this scene, as Homer would then have found the Story yard busy during the warm months. Story built three schooners in 1870: *N.H. Phillips*, 66.93 tons, launched in mid-February; *Alice G. Wonson*, 64.18 tons, launched in mid-year, date unknown; and *Alfred Walen*, 66.77 tons, launched in early November.²⁷ Of these three, *Alice G. Wonson* is the most likely candidate. If Homer had begun this painting in 1869, the only subject would have been the schooner *Chocorua*, 62.87 tons, built jointly by Frisbee and Story, and launched early in June.²⁸ Without knowing when this painting was begun, we can go no further in establishing the vessel's identity.

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It is nonetheless remarkable that if the schooner in Homer's painting cannot be identified, the designs of the two most likely candidates have survived. A fishing schooner of that period was customarily designed by carving a half-model whose lifts were disassembled, traced, and offsets measured for lofting the hull. Once this process was completed, the model was reassembled and stored someplace with little thought given to its historical or artistic values. Many half-models were sacrificed to the shipyard office stove during cold winters, while others survived because no one thought the slightest about them — even as a source of fuel. It was only by chance and benign neglect that some half-models have survived to be appreciated and have their lines recorded.

Chocorua's half-model was brought to the attention of Howard I. Chapelle, who took off its lines and drew a hull plan of the schooner (Figure 9).²⁹ The mod-

el's present whereabouts is unknown; no comments on Chapelle's drawing indicate how he found it or when. Chapelle did most of his gathering of fishing schooner material in the 1930s, mainly with the help of Essex loftsmen and shipcarver Lewis H. Story, so it is most likely that the *Chocorua* model turned up then.³⁰ No records in the Cape Ann Historical Association, the Peabody Essex Museum, or the Smithsonian Institution have been found to indicate that it had been in their custodies, even temporarily.

The half-model of *Alice G. Wonson* (Figure 10) was acquired by the United States Fish Commission some time in the late nineteenth century, probably through the efforts of Captain Joseph W. Collins, the vessel's first skipper and later an employee of the Commission. The model was cataloged by Mitman and later by Chapelle, but its lines, if taken off, have never been published.³¹

No less remarkable is the survival of the half-model of *Grace L. Fears*. It was given posthumously to the Peabody Essex Museum by Mrs. Jacob Story in 1974.³² Chapelle found this model and recorded its lines early in the 1930s, probably also through the efforts of Lewis H. Story. Chapelle drew two hull plans, both undated; the first was published in a series of articles on historic working craft for *Yachting* magazine and later collected in a book titled *American Sailing Craft*.³³ The original draft of this version has disappeared. The second plan (Figure 11) was published in Chapelle's *The American Fishing Schooners*; its original draft is now in Smithsonian Institution.³⁴

²⁷ Ibid., 18 February 1879, p. 2 (launch of *N.H. Phillips*), 4 March 1870, p. 2 (keel of *Alice G. Wonson* laid), and 11 November 1870, p. 2 (launch of *Alfred Walen*).

²⁸ Ibid., 4 June 1879, p. 2.

²⁹ Howard I. Chapelle, *The National Watercraft Collection, Second Edition* (Washington, DC, and Camden, Maine: 1976), p. 360.

³⁰ Erik A.R. Ronnberg, Jr., editor, "Letters of Lewis H. Story to John M. Minuse, 1932-1947", *NRJ* 29:1 (March 1983), p. 3.

³¹ Carl W. Mitman, *Catalogue of the Watercraft Collection in the United States National Museum* (Washington, DC: 1923), pp. 166, 167, and Chapelle, *National Watercraft Collection*, p. 205.

³² Peabody Essex Museum, Marine Objects Catalog (card file): half-hull model of schooner *Bunker Hill*, M-15692 (Acc. #20464). *Grace L. Fears* is not mentioned on the card, although built from this model a year prior to *Bunker Hill*.

³³ Howard I. Chapelle, *American Sailing Craft* (New York: 1935), pp. 79, 80.

³⁴ Chapelle, *Fishing Schooners*, pp. 125, 128, 129, and Smithsonian Institution, *Ship Plan List: Maritime Collection* (Washington, DC: 1984), p. 5.

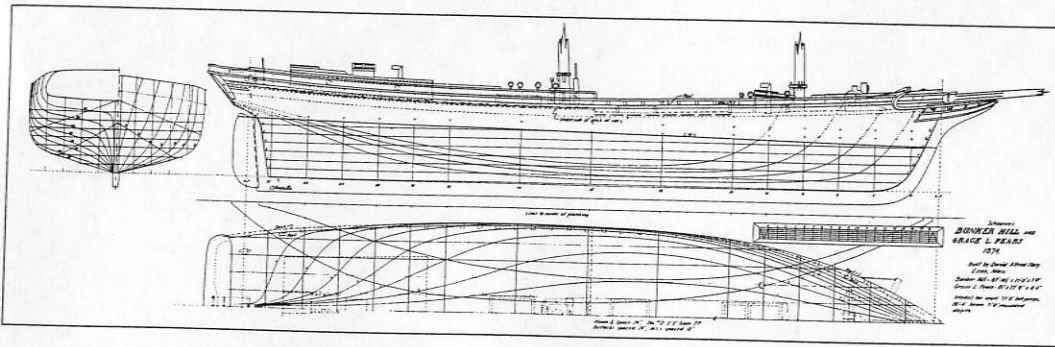


Figure 11. Hull plan of fishing schooner GRACE L. FEARS, 1874, drawn by Howard I. Chapelle, date unknown, and published in *THE AMERICAN FISHING SCHOONERS* (1973). Courtesy The Smithsonian Institution, NMAH/Transportation.

One curious error appears in the plan of *Chocorua* and the second *Fears* draft: their legends state that Story built these schooners in Essex, not Gloucester. What led Chapelle to this claim is a puzzle, especially in light of the first *Fears* draft, which correctly gave the schooner's building place as Gloucester. This confusion may have arisen over speculation on Story's shipbuilding activity (that is, as owner of a shipyard) which has so far been recorded only in Gloucester between the years 1868 and 1880.

The town of Essex, Massachusetts, claims David Alfred Story as a native son — he was familiarly known as "David Alf" as a way of distinguishing him from other Storys with the same first name. Census records indicate that he was born in about 1828. Subsequently, he was listed as a shipwright in 1850, a carpenter in 1855, and a shipbuilder in 1865. A shipbuilder, by local definition, was a master shipwright who owned a shipbuilding business and usually his own shipyard; therefore, it is likely that he had a yard in Essex before moving to Gloucester, but no documentation has been found.³⁵

Story's business and residence in Gloucester can be traced from 1868 to 1880 through newspaper accounts and the Gloucester city directories. The 1880-81 directory states tersely that he had "removed to Essex," but there is no evidence that he was building ships in any Essex yard from that date.³⁶

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

That Winslow Homer's painting *Shipbuilding at Gloucester* agrees closely with a photograph of the same location and a very similar vessel under construction should dispel any doubts about its title. It does indeed depict Gloucester shipbuilding, and it places Homer on Cape Ann at an undocumented time and for unknown reasons, though opportunity

³⁵ Kurt Wilhelm, *Story Genealogy* (Essex, Massachusetts: 1991, unpub. ms.), and Dana A. Story, Essex, Massachusetts, personal communications, August, 1996.

³⁶ Procter Brothers, *The Gloucester Directory, 1880-81, No. VII* (Gloucester: 1880).

and impulse may have been motivating factors. His wood engraving *Shipbuilding, Gloucester* for *Harper's Weekly*, 1873, uses this painting as its setting, imposing on it groups of figures taken from other paintings.³⁷ We can now appreciate the 1871 work as the visual record of a single factual event with all of its component subjects delineated as witnessed, with minimal alteration for the sake of composition.

For art historians, *Shipbuilding at Gloucester* might be regarded as one of Homer's lesser achievements, but for Cape Ann's historians, it now has much more importance as a document of a place and an event. From nautical historians, Homer is due much greater respect and attention for this vivid and accurate impression of shipbuilding technology in nineteenth century New England. ☆

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While I have long been aware of Homer's *Shipbuilding at Gloucester* and Elwell's photograph of shipbuilding at Vincent's Cove, it was Patricia Junker of M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, California, who called my attention to the controversy over the former and asked for my opinion. Many of the research problems were of a type I have seldom confronted, leading me to unfamiliar source material in rarely-visited repositories and collections. I am deeply grateful to the staff of the Gloucester Archives Committee, City Hall, Gloucester, for their persistence in finding material I could only describe vaguely; the staff of the Sawyer Free Library, Gloucester; and the libraries of the Cape Ann Historical Association (Ellen Nelson, Librarian) and the Peabody Essex Museum (John Koza, Stephen Phillips Librarian). Dana Story, historian of Essex shipbuilding, provided biographical information on his distant cousin, David Alfred Story. My research on Gloucester Harbor and its infrastructure was greatly helped by suggestions and information from Ann Banks, Gregory Gibson, and Joseph Santapaola. Paul F. Johnston, Smithsonian Institution, and Linda Muehlig, Smith College Museum of Art, provided material from their collections for reproduction, and much encouragement as well. For their comments on my manuscript and suggestions for publication, my thanks to Carol Troyen, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; John Wilmerding, Princeton University; and Sharon Worley, Cape Ann Historical Association.

³⁷ Atkinson, "Hymns to an Older America", p. 25.