

**North Carolina Maritime History Council
2022 Conference Proposal**

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Title: "Sailing *Bessie*: Reconstructing the Rig of an Antebellum Canoe-Boat"

Abstract:

Canoe-boats, which are crafted from a dugout log but include structural features like those found in plank-on-frame boats, were typically propelled using both oars and sails. Sailing represented a particular challenge to these craft because their log hulls were narrow and featured little freeboard. *Bessie*, one of the few surviving canoe-boats, provides insights into how these craft were sailed. This boat was originally built at White Oak Plantation near Georgetown, South Carolina, sometime before the Civil War. It is now housed in the Charleston Museum in Charleston, South Carolina. While *Bessie*'s masts, sails, and rigging are long gone, surviving features, such as the locations of mast steps and belaying points, provide clues to possible rigs. This paper uses archaeological and historical evidence to reconstruct possible rigging configurations for *Bessie*. It also discusses possible reasons for the changes, and provides a preliminary assessment of *Bessie*'s sailing performance.