

# Tampa Bay Sharpie, *Pompano*

From HAMMS (Historical American Merchant Marine Survey)

“The Tampa Bay sharpies were a distinct type, differing from those built on the Atlantic coast and the sharpies which still operate around the Virginia capes and Pamlico Sound. The bottom of the Tampa Bay sharpies was planked athwartship to the chine, and the topsides were planked longitudinally. The deck and topside planking was wider than that ordinarily used on boats of this size. The timber used was not of the most enduring quality as is evidenced by the fact that this fleet was short-lived and went to the “boneyard” prematurely.

“These vessels, while cheaply constructed, were adapted to the work for which they were designed and were a source of profit to their owners during the brief period in which marketing conditions allowed them to be operated. They had a deep centerboard, the details of which are shown in the plans. They could sail close to the wind and were noted for their speed.

“The *Pompano* was built in 1884 [at Cedar Key] by the late Captain V.B. McIlvaine of Tampa. Tampa was then a fishing village and old Tampa Bay was swarming with fish, including the succulent pompano from which the vessel got its name. The Atlantic coastline had extended its line to Tampa, thus providing an outlet to the northern markets.

Captain McIlvaine was quick to take advantage of this and built a fleet of sharpies, including *Pompano*, which acted as lay boat or receiving vessel for the others. Competitors also built boats of the same type, fulfilling the emergency when fishing vessels were needed in a hurry as they could be built quickly and cheaply from common pine lumber. They were usually rigged with a sprit mainsail stepped far forward, and a leg-of-mutton mizzen. No jibs were carried.

“The remains of the *Pompano* were embedded in the sand at Cockroach Key some 30 miles south of Tampa. Additional data for the lines of this vessel above the chine were obtained from a later built sharpie [*Emily*], which was remodeled for a towboat or tug which is now laid up at Port Tampa. We were fortunate in obtaining an old photograph of the *Pompano* under sail which has been photographed to get a negative. Excavations at Cockroach Key gave details of centerboard construction, bottom planking, chine, stem, stern and rudder.

*Pompano* was purchased by Captain Jno. Saverez in 1918. He operated her in connection with his wholesale fish business in Sarasota until 1921 when a storm beached her and she was abandoned.

By Irwin Schuster, Tampa, FL 33647

**Reader Beware!** *The author is not an engineer nor Naval Architect, nor architect. However, I do hold a degree from the GaTech Department of Architecture, and was once employed as an Engineer in Missile Systems.*

*Go figure!*



“We are indebted to Mrs. V.B. McIlvaine, the widow of the designer and first owner of Tampa, Florida, Captain Batt Fogarty, a boat builder of Bradenton, Florida, Captain Louis Hall of Ruskin, Florida, and Mr. John Saverez of Tampa, a former owner, for information regarding the history of this vessel.”

– John H. Hyde  
(Punctuated as the original document)





I contacted the Smithsonian, and presto... in six short months received documentation, but no real satisfactory answers. In fact, more doubts, as it seems that the drawings are not strictly of *Pompano*, but some measurements and details were from a later built boat of the “same design” (*Emily*, at Port Tampa). *Pompano* is listed and described in HAMMS, Volume II - East Coast Vessels,” Edited by Melvin H. Jackson and published by the WPA and Smithsonian Institution.

### My Experts...

I have studied the Chapelle books, *Small Yachts* by Kunhardt, *Tidecraft* and similar references. I contacted, spoke to and corresponded with:

- **Robb White**, seaman, historian, author and boat designer/builder of Thomasville, GA, who fished the FL Panhandle.
- **Rob Napier**, seaman, past editor of the *Nautical Research Journal*, past boatyard manager, author, professional model builder, consultant to NYYC and other similar organizations.
- **Cedar Key Historical Society**; responded to by **Mike Leiner** of Cedar Key.
- **Tom Hill** of Burlington, VT, author and boat-builder with an interest in historical small boats and Cedar Key craft.
- **Reuell Parker**, author of *The Sharpie Book*, sailor and boat builder of ME & FL.
- **Charley Morgan** of St. Petersburg; FL, yachtsman, yacht designer and builder of international reputation.

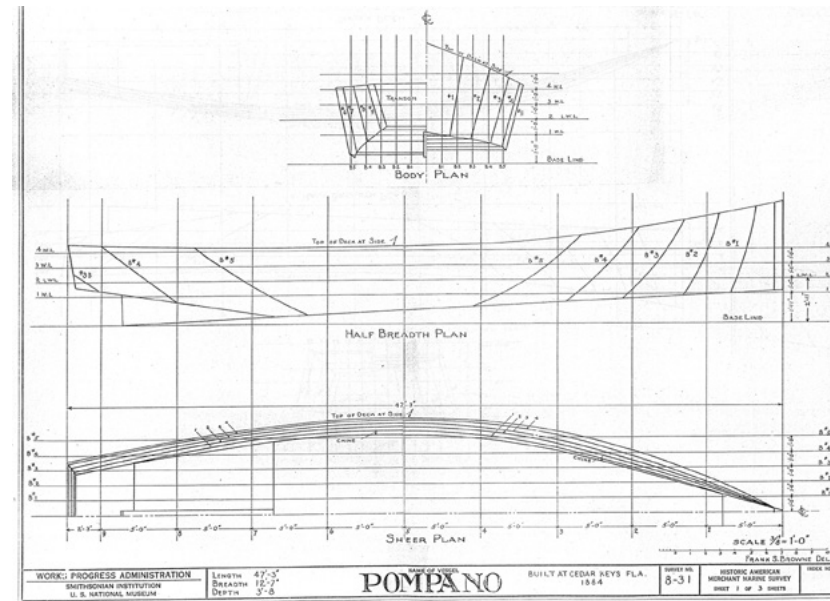
The responses included comments about unreliability of WPA plans, as surveyors and draftsmen skills varied widely. That spruce was unlikely as a spar material in Cedar Key (but anything is possible - could have been recycled). That the structure around the board was going to leak, for sure. That hulls had been built with that sharp knuckle, and one may reside at Mystic, but on a much smaller skiff.

The only reason proposed for limiting the bottom to two flat planes is that it would allow the builder to avoid beveling the bottom planks. It also allows those longitudinal 2x4s, set on edge, to be straight (Page 2, Midship Section).

*Pompano* was designed, built and owned by Captain V.B. McIlvaine. In 2004 I found five and contacted three McIlvaine families in the Tampa Bay area, with no additional information found.

### Designer, Builder, Owner:

Captain V.B. (Victor Bledsoe) McIlvaine  
(1856 - 1912)



**My Conclusions:** I believe that the upper hull configuration of *Pompano* is fairly accurate. The photo verifies this and the rig. But I have grave doubts about the structure and underwater profile. *Pompano* is shown as fully decked. It is not clear if the hull was removed, or only examined and measured. I believe misinterpretations may have been made when the hull was “excavated”. It is hard to believe that the CB and trunk were as shown, for practical reasons. I find it hard to understand why a builder would consider this near-unique hull form to be appropriate and sound either in structure or in hydrodynamic form. A nearly 50 foot boat, even cheaply built, is a considerable investment after all, and in commerce, one would probably not casually experiment.

*Pompano* was about 37 years old when abandoned. It is particularly annoying that the survey plans are not dated, nor is there any indication of when she was measured, which might give some idea of her state of preservation and disintegration when data was taken off. Plans are labeled “Survey No. 8-31.” This might be considered a date, but the WPA was not formed until 1935. I suspect the hull was in very poor shape, stripped and filled with sand or largely disintegrated. Altogether, one may decide on faith that the plans are true, but unless I see further information, I take a more cynical view, and believe that these particular folks, no doubt well intentioned, were simply inexperienced, and quite possibly created a technical myth.

**WHO WAS V.B. McILVAINE?**

V.B. was the manager of Florida Fish & Ice Co.

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE - Nov. 22, 1899

**V. B. M'ILVAINE**  
MANAGER

Dealer in Ship Chanderlery, Fishermens' Supplies, Hardware Netting, Rope, Oil Clothing, Paints, Canvas, Oils, Leaf Tobacco, and General Merchandise. Headquarters for Black Stickers and Black Pommel Slickers. Agent for Br-inig's Lithogen Silicate Paint, the most durable house paint in the world.

**Florida Fish & Ice Company.**  
V. B. M'ILVAINE. Mgr. Com. Dept.  
Corner Water and Washington Streets Telephone 128.

**1860 Census, Levy Co.**

On the 1860 Census of Levy Co., Cedar Key, he is Victor B. McIlvaine, 4 years old, a son of Dr. Robert H. McIlvaine.

**Victor Bledsoe McIlvaine**  
b. 1856 marr. 1881 to Barbara Frances Collier.

Wilmer's wife, (V.B.'s sister) **Anna I. McIlvaine**, can also be seen here, age 12.

57	R. H. McIlvaine	40	m	Physician	Del
"	M. E. "	36	f		Key
"	M. G. "	19	"		Tenn
"	J. F. "	15	m		"
"	Anna I. "	12	f		"
"	Willie B. "	10	m		NC
"	Helen "	8	f		"
"	Edmund H. "	6	m		"
"	Victor B. "	4	m		Fla
"	Margaret "	2	f		"

From: "The Busy Life of W. P. Haisley" which itself is a sub-feature of: "The Beginnings of a School System in Hillsborough County," which is the introduction page to: The Eight Homes of Hillsborough High School (Uncredited).

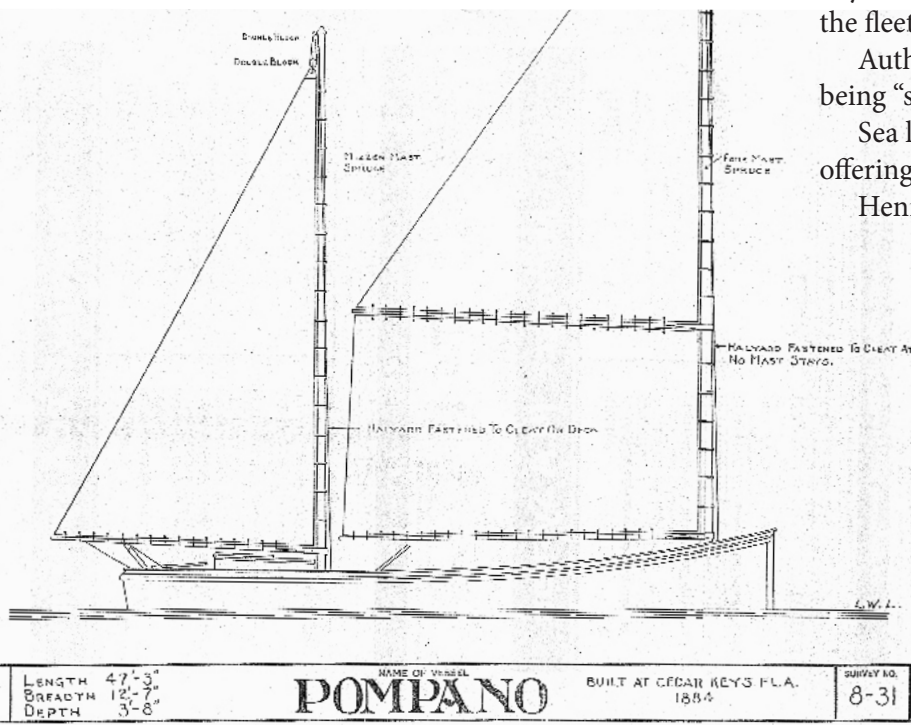
All images are author's photos of a HAMMS folio, except for the above. Note that it discloses V.B. as Victor Bledsoe McIlvaine of Florida Fish & Ice Co.

Lay boat, Buy boat, Market boat, Carry-away, *Pompano* and similar sister craft collected from the fleet of fishermen and delivered the catch to markets around Tampa Bay.

Author, born on the Gulf Beaches in 1935, can attest to the HAMMS line about Tampa Bay being "swarming with fish." The mullet shoaled nose-to-tail and fin-to-fin in the island passes.

Sea life spawned here because the shallow and sheltered bays were ringed with mangroves, offering protection to the small fry.

Henry B. Plant completed the rail line into Tampa the very same year *Pompano* was built!



Scaling from the photo, the unstayed foremast measures about ~58' above the deck.

Specifications	
NAME	Pompano
RIG/TYPE	Sharpie
YR. BUILT	1884
LENGTH O.A.	47' 3"
BEAM	12' 7"
DEPTH	—
DRAFT	9' 1/2" fore, 2' 11" aft
GROSS TONS	5?
NET TONS	5?
DESIGNED BY	V.B. McIlvaine
BUILT BY/ PLACE	V.B. McIlvaine, Cedar Key, Fla.
ORIG. OWNER	V.B. McIlvaine
SERVICE	Fishing
PROVENANCE	
PLAN DATA	Some measurements from remains of vessel. Other

Materials Used in Construction
Keel: Pine • Floors: Pine • Planking: Pine • Shelf beam: Pine • Water ways: Pine • Deck: Pine • Rails: Pine • Bitts: Oaks • Fastenings: Galv. iron • Ballast: None • Spars: Spruce • Stem and stern: Pine • Frames: Pine • Clamp beam: Pine • Knees: None • Deck beams: Pine • Ceiling: Pine • House: Pine • Coamings: Pine •

**Ice** was transported by boat from northern lakes until, in the mid-1800's, Dr. John Gorrie, in Apalachicola, invented a machine to do the job and in 1851 was granted the first U.S. patent for refrigeration.