HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED:

SOLOMONS DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Part II - 1950-2000

By Paul L. Berry

[Note: This article completes the review of Solomons during the twentieth century, begun in the spring issue. Changes during the second half of the century were more numerous and dramatic than during the first half; they are certainly clearer in the minds of a larger number of readers. It is likely that this brief review will have missed events and changes well known to many readers.]

Solomons during the second half of the twentieth century experienced profound changes — from a rather self-contained community at the lower end of Calvert County to a community that was increasingly "discovered" by the wider world. These changes actually began with World War II when the United States Navy established facilities in the lower Patuxent River area: the Amphibious Training Base on the Dowell peninsula, the Naval Mine Warfare Test Station at Point Patience, and, with less direct impact, the Naval Air Station across the Patuxent in St. Mary's County. These naval facilities brought thousands of transients to Solomons, but provided jobs for residents of the area.

The end of the war also saw a renewed interest in "the good life" through relative prosperity and more leisure time after the period of wartime austerity. This "good life" found expression in the Solomons area through recreational boating, sport fishing, and the nearby developments of vacation homes. In the years immediately preceding 1950, the M. M. Davis shipyard began building and marketing a popular family cruiser, a new shopping center appeared just north of Avondale, and a large tract of land on Drum Point was sold for development. Solomons was moving into a new era.

The 1950s — Expansion

Although the great influx of military personnel had left Solomons after the war, the area did not return completely to its former days. The Mine Warfare Test Station remained at Point Patience with a staff of under a hundred during the 1950s, mostly housed on the station, but with some local employment. Similarly, local residents found employment across the river at the Naval Air Station, using a chartered boat for daily transportation. The largest single employer remained the M. M. Davis & Son shipyard, now under the management of George W. Townsend of New York.

County residents built hundreds of the Cruis-Alongs — "affordable family boats" — that were marketed nationally through boating magazines and boat shows. Taking advantage of the "baby-boom" families and the great increase in family automobiles, Drum Point Beach marketed its vacation homes, beaches, and lakes. In 1957 the Drum Point corporation sold off a large tract of its property for further marketing by the Chesapeake Ranch Estates.

By 1950, Calvert County's population was 15 percent above that of 1940, and much of this increase was in the lower county. There were enough permanent and temporary residents to support the new D&L shopping center north of Solomons, providing a second movie house and a bowling alley. Slot machines — then legal in Southern Maryland — were found in many places in Solomons, as new restaurants appeared. Sport fishing attracted many from Baltimore and Washington, who also were attracted by powerboat races and annual regattas sponsored by the Solomons Island Yacht Club. The big event in 1954 was the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the county’s founding.

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LATE — AND GOOD — NEWS!

The Calvert County Commissioners have agreed to accept the Cove Point Lighthouse from the Coast Guard (excluding the light itself). Under the management of the Calvert Marine Museum, the lighthouse site will be open to the public, possibly beginning in early 2001. Further details will appear in issues of the Bugeye Times and newspaper announcements.
HOLIDAYS IN 2000

By Maureen Baughman, Museum Store Manager

Have you ever wondered what the holidays were like for the families living in the Drum Point Lighthouse? What kind of Christmas tree did they have and how was it decorated? Do we celebrate the holiday differently today than in the past? We don’t have a lot of information, but the little bit that we do have comes from Anna Weems Ewalt who was born in the lighthouse in 1906, and for much of her childhood continued to visit her grandparents during James Loch Weems’s tenure as keeper from 1891 until 1918. She told us that the rooms were decorated with greenery, and that each year a cedar tree was chopped down from the woods near Drum Point. Ornaments were hung, some of them handmade. The children strung popcorn and cranberries and tied cookies to bits of ribbon. Anna’s grandfather saved the foil wrappers from his tobacco and wrapped walnuts to hang on the tree. There was goose for dinner, and family and friends would come and visit. “Christmas was a cheerful time,” said Anna. It sounds as if Christmas traditions haven’t changed a lot over the years.

Even though Anna Weems Ewalt is no longer alive to help, we still decorate the Drum Point Lighthouse as she remembered it as a little girl. Come and visit CMM this holiday and enjoy a bit of history – think of Solomons as it has changed over the past century. At the same time, you can enjoy some history in the making as Solomons is once again aglow with luminaries for the annual Christmas Walk on December 8 to 10. Walk the streets of Solomons and enjoy the beautiful decorations and camaraderie of your friends and family. Carolers will be singing around the island. Make sure that you stop at the museum to visit Santa Claus. The annual museum Members’ Yule Party will be held on Sunday, December 10. It’s a great opportunity to get in the holiday spirit! Plan to shop in the Museum Store that evening and receive a 20-percent discount on most items (books remain at the standard member discount of 10 percent). Take a moment to really look at the Drum Point Lighthouse and remember that Christmas was – and should be – “a cheerful time.”
SMOKEY ROBINSON THRILLS THOUSANDS AT CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM

On Sunday, September 3, Smokey Robinson put on a Waterside 2000 performance worthy of his legendary status.

In front of an audience of 3,200 at CMM’s Washington Gas Pavilion, the Motown great, accompanied by a string orchestra and dancing girls, performed two-hours of his greatest hits, including the ever-popular “I Second That Emotion,” and “Tears of a Clown.” The crowd also appreciated Smokey’s rendition of “My Girl,” a song he wrote for The Temptations. Dressed in all white, Smokey had the crowd out of their seats and dancing in the aisles, many reminiscing about their younger years of love and romance.

Waterside 2000 wishes to thank the many volunteers and CMM staff who take time out of their busy lives to help make our concerts a successful reality. Waterside also wishes to thank its sponsors including 97.7 The Bay; Ralph’s Dodge-Jeep; Cumberland & Erly, LLC; Solomons Landing; Woodburns of Solomons; Roy Rogers; RadioShack; Coors, Coors Light & Killian’s (Bozick Distributors); DM Group; Holiday Inn Select Solomons; Mom’s in the Kitchen Catering; Comcast; SMECO; Bay Weekly; Main Message Center; Chesapeake Publishing Group; and Washington Gas.

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with all county residents participating. The Korean conflict did dampen spirits in the early 1950s, but the shipyard had a government contract for minesweepers that kept its workforce busy. When the conflict ended, the shipyard returned to production of small cruisers under new management by the workers themselves. The former Naval Amphibious Training Base was leased to Maryland’s Board of Natural Resources to service the fisheries patrol fleet. A volunteer rescue service was organized in the mid-1950s, located in a building near the D&L shopping center. In general, the 1950s were the beginning of livelier times, with growth and an influx of a new kind of outsider.

The 1960s — Commerce, and Set-Backs

The county’s population in 1960 was nearly 16,000, a significant increase from 1950 of 30 percent, and with the lower county claiming its share. The decade saw another 30 percent increase in the population of the county. Some summer cottages attracted year-round residents. There were some setbacks in Solomons: the test center facilities at Point Patience cut back to some extent; in 1961 the Dowell peninsula property of the former Amphibious Training Base was sold into private hands for a yacht club and marina; and the shipyard work declined as fiberglass boats gained in popularity over the wooden-hulled boats turned out there. The yard was bought in 1960 by the Century Boat Company of Wisconsin to produce large custom cruisers, and then Century sold out in 1966 to Ventnor of New Jersey which soon closed the yard. Although the decade generally held on to the progress of the 1950s, the rate of growth slowed. The end of the era of slot machines in Southern Maryland also had an impact on business and revenues for the county. The U. S. Coast Guard automated the light at Drum Point, thus closing the lighthouse that had operated there since 1883. The decade closed, however, on these positive notes: Baltimore Gas and Electric Company began preparation for the construction of a nuclear power plant north of Lusby, promising jobs and revenue for the county; local residents of Solomons became sufficiently concerned by the loss of their heritage to undertake the organization and

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Sharkfest

As usual, the activities at the museum found their way to Soleboathouse, the annual Sharkfest! Boats also provided trips in the CMM boat basin during Sharkfest!

Local boatbuilders Francis and Wayne Goddard were honored at CMM on July 8 and 9 with a display of some of their small boats. The Goddards have well over one hundred custom boats to their credit, ranging from skiffs to skipjacks.

The Canoe Club provided trips in the CMM boat basin during Sharkfest.

An exhibit entitled "Fantasy Habitat" occurred from August 5 until September 10. The exhibit was a joint effort by fourteen local artists portraying a fantasy of Calvert County. The exhibit was sponsored by the Calvert County Arts Council and Trust, Port Republic.

Flo Strean (center) explains sharks to visitors during Sharkfest! CMM photo by Lance Strozier

Sharkfest! on July 15 was supported by members of the museum's Fossil Club, here shown at their display table in the Exhibition Building. Left to right: Pat Fink, Flo Strean, Steve Grossman, Kathy Haberny, Cheryl Snelson, and Tom Haberny. CMM photo by Lance Strozier

Local boatbuilders Francis and Wayne Goddard were honored at CMM on July 8 and 9 with a display of some of their small boats. The Goddards have well over one hundred custom boats to their credit, ranging from skiffs to skipjacks. CMM photo by Richard Dodds

Flo Strean (center) explains sharks to visitors during Sharkfest! CMM photo by Lance Strozier
Cradle of Invasion

The third Cradle of Invasion weekend on August 12 and 13 drew many visitors to CMM. Events included an opening ceremony at the Washington Gas Pavilion, a luncheon and a 1940s fashion show at Asbury-Solomons Island, and a dinner-dance at the Solomons Island Yacht Club (the local USO club during the war years). Fashion show models (left to right): Wes Stone, Gretchen Ritchie, Shirley Wilder, Laura O’Neill, Heather Phelps, John Aubrey Stone, Karen Stone, and Sue Hanna. CMM photos by Bob Hall.

The Patuxent Small Craft Guild installed a c. 1960-63 four-cylinder Graymarine engine in the Sewell draketail that has been the guild’s major project for many months. On September 8 the boat was launched at Washburn’s Boat Yard and towed to the CMM boat basin. A dedicatory ceremony was held at the museum on September 30. Guild members involved here (left to right): Paul Adams, Bill Lake, Al Lavish, and CMM boatwright George Surgent. CMM photo by Richard Dodds.

Unusual sculptural effects were works of habitat designed for creatures found in seavor with the American Chestnut Land Hall.
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building of a "Maritime Museum" with support from the Calvert County Historical Society.

The 1970s — Connections
This decade saw the beginning of more organized tourism in Solomons, with another shopping center, more restaurants, marinas, and the new museum. Although the Mine Warfare Test Station began closing down, becoming the Naval Recreation Center, the Naval Air Station in St. Mary's County continued strong, still a source of employment. There was an effort to restart the Cruis-Along business in the old shipyard on Mill Creek, but this effort was short-lived, closing permanently in 1973. By decade's end the J. C. Lore and Sons Oyster Company closed after nearly a century of packing and shipping seafood from Solomons. Other employers, however, appeared nearby in the county: BG&E's Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant, the Columbia LNG Terminal at Cove Point, and the El Paso Marine Terminal at Ship Point on Solomons harbor.

A landmark development of the 1970s was the building and opening in 1977 of the Governor Thomas Johnson Memorial Bridge between Calvert and St. Mary's Counties. Both counties were affected: Calvert residents had access to employment in St. Mary's County and St. Mary's residents access to the water recreation in Solomons. Restaurants and shops on the island benefited. The greater ease of communication between the two counties encouraged more tourist interest in Southern Maryland — tourists could easily enjoy both counties in a single trip.

There was a new interest in local history as St. Mary's City, Sotterley, and Solomons developed museums. In October 1970 the Calvert Maritime Museum was opened in a small building on the island, and interest from local residents and tourists encouraged further expansion. After the closing of the Solomons School in 1971, the historical society obtained use of the school building, and by 1975 opened the expanded museum there. The name "Calvert Maritime Museum" was changed to "Calvert Marine Museum" to recognize a broader interest in marine biology and paleontology. That same year saw the move of the abandoned Drum Point Lighthouse onto museum property, following ten years of negotiations among federal, state, and county governments. By 1978 the county acquired the property of the recently closed J. C. Lore Oyster Company, as well as two of the company's boats, the Penguin and the Wm. B. Tennison. The oyster house and the boats became important exhibits of the museum. Another activity that attracted many people to Solomons was Patuxent River Appreciation Days, started in 1978. When the 1970s ended, Solomons was more "connected" with the wider world of Southern Maryland and was on the threshold of further significant changes.

The 1980s — A Town Center and Roads
Between 1970 and 1980 the county experienced an amazing 67 percent increase in population, and the lower county was affected by this growth. Solomons experienced more changes, in no small part due to the new intercounty bridge and improvements in access roads. There were more businesses, more restaurants, new lodgings, more residential building in the general area (but fewer residences on Solomons Island), and expansions of facilities at the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory and the Calvert Marine Museum. The county government recognized new challenges, adopting new comprehensive plans and amending its zoning ordinances. One of these changes had a direct impact on Solomons: in 1986 it became the first town center established in the county. Along with this new zoning came the installation of water and sewer systems. The two new motels — the Holiday Inn and the Comfort Inn — were joined by bed-and-breakfast establishments. Several new residential developments appeared in the general area: The Harbor at Solomons, Oyster Bay, and Twin Coves in Dowell; Solomons Landing and Patuxent Point north of Avondale. Supporting these expansions was the completion of the dual-lane route 2/4 from Prince Frederick to Solomons, as well as some road improvements on the island. A problem with the Thomas Johnson Bridge in the late 1980s resulted in its closing for several months, but this was only a temporary set-back to growth.

The 1990s — Buildings, New and Lost
The final decade of the twentieth century saw continued, but a slight slowing in growth in Calvert County — only a 48 percent increase from 1980 to 1990. Although there was a lull in building in those developments near Solomons that were started late in the 1980s, by mid-decade there was a growth spurt, including the addition of two senior citizens complexes nearby. A decision in the mid-1990s by the U. S. Navy to expand the Patuxent River Naval Air Station had a noticeable effect on lower Calvert County, especially in the Lusby area to the north. On the island, new businesses appeared, sometimes adapting older residences, but all-too-frequently replacing them. In Avondale, a compatible commercial building replaced an older store, but the Solomons Master Plan of 1986 held down commercial development there. The Patuxent Plaza shopping center north of Avondale underwent improvements, as did the earlier shopping center farther north. Two new shopping centers even farther north appeared by mid-decade. The Holiday Inn doubled its size, attracting more conferences to Solomons.

Not all changes were commercial. Calvert County carried out a beautification program along the riverside of the island, including a new bulkhead, parking, boardwalk, an attractive Watermen's Memorial, a Victorian gazebo, and signage.
describing significant features and local history. A sidewalk along the road encouraged more strolling to the shops and restaurants. Even the Maryland State Highway Administration added to the beautification of route 4 near Solomons, and added a parallel service road that improved access and safety. The Chesapeake Biological Laboratory expanded its land and buildings at the far end of the island, and opened a visitors’ center to explain its research activities to the public. The Calvert Marine Museum developed further the new exhibition facility opened in 1989, and it restored the exterior appearance of the earlier museum building to that of the Solomons School of 1925. At the upper end of Avondale, the county opened a visitors’ center, while to the north, the Annmarie Garden on St. John Creek was created, with a sculpture garden and new features added annually. A modern medical building opened late in 1999. The decade saw a lot of change.

A Summary of the Century
During the twentieth century Solomons changed from a rather isolated community to a recognized tourist and recreational destination. Although the 350-resident population in 1900 of the core Solomons area — the island and adjacent Avondale — changed little, the larger nearby area increased tremendously. More significant, however, was the change in the character of the area, from dependence on commercial fisheries and supporting industries (shipyards, sailmakers, blacksmiths, a fish factory, and so forth) to a tourist economy of motels, marinas, restaurants, fast food outlets, major museum, biological research facility, sculpture garden, and the military recreational area. There are now fewer residences and more businesses, but residents enjoy the expected modern amenities of utilities, cable television, an excellent fire and rescue service, and access to a medical facility. The postal service moved several times during the century, but still does not include home delivery of mail on the island or in Avondale. The same three churches remain — two in their original buildings and locations — with additional churches within a few miles. There is no longer a public school in Solomons, but a parochial elementary school attracts students from a broad area. Several annual events draw thousands to Solomons: a “spring launch,” GardenFest, Family Discovery Day, Blessing of the Fleet, Waterside concerts, fireworks, ArtsFest, Patuxent River Appreciation Days, Solomons Christmas Walk, and a Christmas lights display. Solomons at the end of the twentieth century is a dynamic place, still changing, but with a distinctive character of location that attracts both permanent residents and transient visitors.
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Annual September Meeting

By Janet Addiss

Once again the Volunteer Council members gathered on September 13 for the Annual Soiree and the installation of new officers to serve during the 2000-2001 year. Our slate of officers reads as follows: president, Janet Addiss; vice-president, David Aldridge; recording secretary, Donna Miller; corresponding secretary, Betty Bailey; and treasurer, Jack Schnell. Janet has been the council’s vice-president for the past year and has been active for several years with other volunteer activities. Dave has been an information host for several years. Donna and Betty have both been active volunteers for several years in various positions. Jack is returning for his third year as treasurer.

Our festivities began at 5:00 p.m. with a social gathering and refreshments in the Exhibition Building lobby. As part of a brief program, Ned Sprague, outgoing president, presented Ken Kaumeyer, curator of estuarine biology, with a check for $1,350 from our spring yard sale, to be applied to a feasibility habitat study for the otters. Our other good news is that the JC Penney’s Golden Rule Award of $250, given to Janet Addiss for her volunteer service, will be used for materials for the museum’s summer programs for children’s camps. We are fortunate to have this money to put to these uses, and we hope to encourage this type of activity for the coming year. We have some very new faces on the Volunteer Council this season and we plan to continue with all the good things we have done in the past. To accomplish this, your council needs your cooperation, and it is our hope to make ourselves available to all areas of the museum that require our help. Since all activities start with our council members, we look forward to participating with everyone in the museum community. Do continue to come and enjoy our activities, like the Annual Soiree. I know you will be pleased with what goes on in our museum family.

We invite Calvert Marine Museum Society members to become part of our volunteer family. If you have ever wanted to become more involved with the museum, we are in need of people with a variety of skills. Whether you’re a “people” person who would enjoy working with the public, a master carpenter, or a behind-the-scenes worker, your donation of time would be most appreciated. Even if you do not think that your background is compatible with our themes, we will provide training. There are many perks to being a volunteer. You become part of a group of people who take pride in their community and heritage and contribute to a positive future for the museum. Volunteers receive a larger discount at the museum store and enjoy various appreciation events. In return, we ask that you volunteer at least twenty-four hours a year, go through the orientation process and necessary training, and maintain your membership in the marine society. To find out more, call volunteer coordinator, Leslie Scher Brown, at 410-326-2042, extension 19, or email her at volunteers@calvertmarinemuseum.com.

CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM

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