HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED:
SOLOMONS DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Part I – 1900-1949
By Paul L. Berry

During the final weeks of 1999 the media have had many features summarizing the events of the past century. It seems appropriate, therefore, to consider how Solomons and its adjacent areas fared during this period of great changes. Until after the Civil War, Solomons Island (then Sandy Island) was relatively undeveloped — one or two buildings and some cultivated land — but with the arrival of Isaac Solomon and his oyster packing plant in late 1860s, growth began. By the end of the nineteenth century, Solomons was a well-established small town (the second largest in Calvert County), with bright prospects for the future. The museum has created a “time freeze” of the Solomons area in 1900 in the model by Jimmy Langley that can be viewed in the maritime history exhibit.

The 1900s

At the beginning of the 1900s there was an important expansion at Solomons. The area just to the north on the mainland was developed into a community named Avondale. The Dowell peninsula had developed earlier, and new development was planned across Solomons harbor at Ship Point and Rousby Hall. On the island itself, the census enumerator in June 1900 reported ninety-one “households” with 350 residents (including some boarders and servants), while in adjacent Avondale, he reported nineteen “households” with 109 residents. The nearby areas of Dowell, Olivet, and Rousby Hall could not be readily identified in the census report, but added more residents to these figures. In addition to residences in the immediate Solomons area, there were three churches, a school (limited to eight grades), three prominent shipyards, several stores, two steamboat wharves, a fraternal lodge building, canning factory, flour mill, fish processing plant, two blacksmith shops, and cemeteries. With the river and bay for transportation, Solomons was in touch with a wider world, but was also quite self sufficient. (A proposed railroad link to Drum Point had failed ten years earlier.)

The occupations listed for these residents were predominantly “oysterman,” “fisherman,” or “ships carpenter,” but there were also blacksmiths, merchants, ministers, barbers, a physician, a teacher, a pilot, and even a farmer. This is consistent with what we know of the economy of Solomons at the time: principally the fisheries industry (oysters and crabs in season), along with the supporting shipyards and suppliers. In the summer there was a small tourism business, with several of the homes being offered as boarding houses for visitors and relatives arriving by steamboat.

Shipbuilding and repairing provided a thriving industry for employment. From 1900 through 1909, the three shipyards — M. M. Davis, James T. Marsh, and George T. Dawson (leasing the marine railway of Thomas Moore) — produced at least forty vessels, chiefly sailing craft, including a 168-foot schooner barge, but also fourteen steam tugboats. Several pleasure vessels appeared during this decade: five gasoline-powered yachts from Davis and two (Continued on Page 6)

CMM REACHES THIRTY

As the new heading on this issue of the Bugeye Times shows, the year 2000 is the thirtieth since CMM was opened on Solomons Island in 1970.
WATERSIDE MUSIC SERIES - UPDATE

Waterside 2000 kicked off its year by showcasing folk artist Dobi Smith and Eddie From Ohio's Robbie Schaefer on February 12 in the auditorium. Both put on a great show for the 100+ guests, who ranged from those unfamiliar with both artists to self-described groupies.

On April 1, 97.7 The Bay and Ralph's Dodge-Jeep present Waterside 2000 with jazz saxophone artist Ron Holloway. Join the fun as Ron brings his jazz grooves and swingin' saxophone vibes to the museum's auditorium. Tickets are $15 for the general public and $13 for CMM members. Tickets go on sale March 17, and are available at the Museum Store or by calling 410-326-2042. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for the 7:30 p.m. performance. Beverages will be available. For more information, call the museum or visit our new website at www.calvertmarinemuseum.com.

**MAJOR CONCERT ANNOUNCEMENT**

The “King of Blues,” B.B. King, swings back to Calvert Marine Museum on Friday, May 26, for a 7:30 p.m. show. Guests at B.B.'s 1998 performance in Solomons know that this is one show you won't want to miss. Tickets prices are as follows: Premium, $45 ($41 members); Select, $35 ($32 members); and Reserved, $25 ($23 members). Tickets go on sale at midnight on May 3 by calling 1-800-787-9454. Ticket sales at the museum will begin at 10:00 a.m. CMM members can reserve tickets early by mailing or faxing the special ticket form in this Bugeye Times. While this form guarantees you a seat, it may not be the best seat. For the best seats available, call 1-800-787-9454 at midnight on May 3. For more information, please call the Waterside Hotline, beginning April 1st, at 410-394-6654.

Waterside concerts raise funds to support CMM programs and exhibits. Waterside 2000 sponsors include 97.7 The Bay; Ralph's Dodge-Jeep; Cumberland and Erly, LLC.; Coors, Coors Light, and Killians; Solomons Landing; Boyd King Electronics-A RadioShack Dealer; Roy Rogers (Gould Enterprises); Woodburns of Solomons; Bay Weekly; DM Group; Holiday Inn Select Solomons; Mom's in the Kitchen Catering; Comcast; SMECO; Main Message Center. We also acknowledge the valuable support CMM receives from both the Calvert County Board of Commissioners and the taxpayers of Calvert County.
Society Snapshot!


Taking Membership to A Higher Level are members who upgraded recently: Steven & Michelle West, Jack & Doris Johnson, Mr. & Mrs. William King, Mr. & Mrs. John Gott, Joe & Andrea Carbonaro, Mr. & Mrs. Robert Barnack, Nancie S. Hillsman, Richard & Barbara Day, Larry & Bonnie Ohler, Mr. & Mrs. W.R. Roebling, Andrew & Karin Roscoe, Garth & Jackie VanSickle, Bruce & Ruby Wile.

Bugeye Ball Sponsorship

Since 1990, the Bugeye Ball has provided over $100,000 in support of special projects, education, and development for programs at the museum.

In the next decade it is our hope to significantly increase the support the Bugeye Ball provides to the museum and its special projects, and now is your chance to help. Become a Bugeye Ball underwriter and your name will be printed in the invitations (which are mailed to over 2,500 members) as well as in the Bugeye Ball program distributed to all attendees. Please consider pledging your gift by returning the form below by May 1, 2000. Donations are deductible at the rate of the gift amount less the cost of the reservation (approximately $25).

Underwriting Categories:

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<td>Benefactor</td>
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Please make your check payable to CMMS, P.O. Box 97, Solomons, MD 20688. Formal invitations will be mailed in August.

Yule Party...Biggest Ever!

Over 400 members turned out December 12th to enjoy an evening just for them. Pat the Magician thrilled the children, the Patuxent High School String Quartet entertained the crowd with holiday music, and our special Santa Claus passed out prizes to all who graced his lap! Door prizes were donated from Boaters World, Hair Port, DiGiovanni’s Restaurant, Apex Theaters, Town & Country Liquors, and Common Grounds coffee shop.

Thanks to all those wonderful volunteers who helped make the evening memorable. Many exciting plans are already in the works for next year! Plan to be there!

Receive Freebies for Upgrading!

Each year an average of 100 devoted members decide to upgrade their memberships. Members who increase their membership level also increase their impact on the future of the museum. Your membership support in the past has helped preserve the Wm. B. Tennison, build the lifesize Micocene shark skeleton, and double classes for our children; now imagine the things we could accomplish with the additional support over an upgraded membership...

For the remainder of the year members choosing to upgrade their membership to the Contributing level will receive two free passes for a Wm. B. Tennison cruise. That’s in addition to the regular benefits of admission, and two guest passes. Members upgrading to the Sustaining level or above will receive the beautiful book “Working the Water” in addition to the normal benefits of membership. So when you receive your renewal notice in the mail consider increasing your support to the museum by increasing the benefits you receive as a member!

Thanks for your continuing support.
African-American Heritage Month was recognized at CMM with songs, storytelling, and an exhibit on African-American Maritime Heritage.

Philip J. Merrill of the “Antiques Roadshow” was joined by storyteller Uluaipou Aiono in entertaining and enlightening families during the program in CMM’s auditorium on February 26.

“Pepper” Langley Appreciation Day on January 23 included a Certificate of Appreciation presented by CMM director Doug Alves. A large number of “Pepper”’s fans were on hand for this event.
The “Winter Lights” celebration on January 15 included tours to the Cove Point Lighthouse. CMM photo by Bob Hall

A cake-baking contest was also part of the “Winter Lights” celebration. CMM photo by Bob Hall

THE 2000 SEASON FOR THE WM. B. TENNISON

During this past winter the museum’s cruise boat, the Wm. B. Tennison, has undergone very extensive work at Zahniser’s Yachting Center, including replacement of twelve frames, repairs to the deck, pilothouse, forward cabin, and the installation of a new diesel engine. Under current plans, the Tennison will return to a regular schedule of cruises on Wednesday, May 3, 2000. For more information, call the museum at 410-326-2042 or check our website at www.calvertmarinemuseum.com.

Scott Russell at work on the stern area of the Wm. B. Tennison early this year. Photo by Richard Dodds
HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED

from Marsh, one of which was an auxiliary schooner yacht of 115 feet. These figures, of course, do not represent the many small “backyard” boats of local builders. Robert and George Barrie, cruising into Solomons in 1901, described it as “... a perfect nest of little ship-yards....”

Because of its deep and protected harbor, Solomons attracted the U. S. Navy during this decade, as a greater emphasis on naval power followed the close of the Spanish American War and a growing American colonialism. Naval vessels appeared at the mouth of the river for maneuvers; the great event of 1905 was the testing of the dry dock Dewey in the river waters off the western side of the island, with several small battleships involved in the tests. The town entertained the “sailors” during these visits.

Except for a few excitements, life during the decade revolved around the churches, fraternal organizations, school, jousting tournaments, picnics, home entertainment, and travel to Baltimore. It was not a decade of commercial entertainment, although a speaker might appear from time to time. People knew each other and helped each other out in time of need.

The 1910s

During the early part of this decade, life continued much as before, but Solomons began to be noticed more by the outside world. After years of neglect, the State Roads Commission built a concrete seawall along the western side of the island, completed a causeway between Avondale and the island, and provided a solid (but unpaved) road from the causeway to the end of the island — the same route today of State Road 2. Roads also provided greater access to the upper part of the county. Along the road appeared telephone poles on which were strung wires for a telephone in Webster’s store and a few other locations. (The Cove Point Lighthouse also had a telephone.) In 1911, the school let the students out to witness the arrival of the first motor car, and by 1915 there was a bus service to Annapolis. Each summer after 1914 the James Adams Floating Theatre made a stop of several days at Solomons. More tourists arrived — including President Woodrow Wilson by yacht in 1916. The fishing industries continued to provide employment, as did the shipyards, which turned out nearly forty vessels during the decade. But there was a change: fewer sailing vessels were built, indicating a switch from larger craft (schooner and bugeyes) to the smaller skipjacks that were being built elsewhere. A half-dozen powered vessels were built for the menhaden fisheries of Reedville, Virginia, and as many steam tugs for Washington and Baltimore. A few more powered pleasure yachts were built. The Davis shipyard — moved during the decade from the island to a new yard across the harbor on Mill Creek — built a freighter of 206 feet in early 1917. This prepared Davis to accept contracts from the Emergency Shipping Board in World War I to build five large (125 feet) harbor tugs. A demand for unpowered barges, however, involved too much “red tape” for James Henry Marsh (who took over the Marsh yard after his father’s death in 1909), so he sold the yard in 1917 and moved to Baltimore.

Daily life during the 1910s did not vary much from the earlier decade — Solomons depended upon its own activities. World War I affected Solomons by increased employment for shipbuilding, and also by the armed services for the local young men. One of oyster shipper Joseph C. Lore’s sons — Arick — died in Europe and is still honored by name in the local American Legion post.

THE 1920s

Solomons recovered from the effects of the World War as did other communities in the nation — more aware of the outside world, and enjoying some (but not all) of the recent developments in technology. Roads were further improved, bringing more tourists in the summer, and allowing a different form of transportation for residents. There was less dependency on the steamboats from Baltimore and more on the automobile and trucks. The fisheries industry was still strong — the Lores and the Woodburns operated packing plants at the north end of the island and had the state “patent” land to them that was built up on oyster shells from these plants. Merchants did more business, especially in selling to those interested in sport fishing and to yachtsmen who sailed into Solomons in the summer. Clarence Davis (son of M. M. Davis) even allowed tent camping on land he owned at the south end near Sandy Point. Evans Pavilion was popular for motion pictures, and dances were held in the Episcopal Parish House. The James Adams Floating Theatre called at Solomons most seasons. Despite its modernity, however, Solomons still did not have electricity, although some residents had gas light plants or their own small power plants. An ice plant also produced some electricity. Out of season, however, Solomons still maintained its small-town existence.

Citizens of Solomons became more concerned with the lack of educational facilities for their children. An early one-room school had been replaced before 1900 with a larger school near the Methodist Church, but schooling here ended with the eighth grade. Families wanting a high school education for their children sent them to private academies in St. Mary’s County or to schools in Baltimore. (This same situation existed throughout Calvert County at that period.)

Soon after the war there were efforts to provide high school classes in the Episcopal Parish House, supported by state funds for a teacher. Citizens seeking a larger school raised several thousand dollars to purchase over four acres from J. C. Webster who in 1919 had bought a large property north of Avondale for development. With this donation of land by citizens, the county and state agreed to build the school — preserved to this day as the Administration Building of the museum — which was completed and opened in 1925. All grades from one to eleven were taught there (Maryland required only eleven
The 1930s

The Great Depression reached Solomons as it did the rest of the country, but there was still bounty to be had from the waters of the river and bay, as well as revenue from summer visitors. Boarding houses and eating establishments catered to these visitors, and they patronized the fishing captains. Recreational boating was encouraged by the establishment in 1937 of the Solomons Island Yacht Club which, among other activities, sponsored annual power-boat regattas for the five years before the war. The state of Maryland appropriated funds for an impressive building for the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory that opened in 1931, with ties to several academic institutions. But evidence of the reduced national economy could be seen daily in the form of several large ocean liners that were “mothballed” along the river shore where the Thomas Johnson bridge now rises. These large ships were no longer needed for active service by the United States Shipping Board, but were too valuable to scrap. Additionally, the Standard Oil Company laid up a large ship of 143 feet. One tug, the Luna, pioneered the use of diesel-electric propulsion, and this boat is today being restored in Boston harbor. The most amazing statistic, however, is that Davis built four power yachts, three houseboats, and thirty sailing yachts, mostly the designs of prominent marine architects. Whatever wealth existed in Baltimore and Washington found its way to Solomons!  In 1936 Clarence Davis died suddenly of a heart attack, but the company was soon sold to a New York yachtsman, George H. Townsend, who took over and promoted further the custom yacht business with some initial success. Work decreased by decade’s end, however, and the yard was reduced to building pedal boats for the New York World’s Fair of 1939 and various recreational parks.

The 1940s

This was a most significant decade for Solomons: it brought in the outside world with a vengeance. Despite the success of the 1930s, the war at the shipyard declined precipitously in the first years of the 1940s – only two yachts and three fishing boats in 1940 and 1941 – affecting employment and the economy as a result. Lifelong resident “Pepper” Langley tells in his book Remember that he left Solomons for work in Baltimore, and others followed suit. War work started there and at Annapolis before Solomons. Soon after war was declared in 1941, however, the U. S. Navy rediscovered the Patusxent River area and moved in: first to St. Mary’s County for the Naval Air Station, then to the Dowell peninsula for the Amphibious Training Base (ATB), and finally to Point Patience for the Naval Mine Warfare Test Station. By 1942 the Davis shipyard began building boats of 65 and 125 feet for the Army Transportation Corps, turning out a hundred or so in two years. All of these events served to increase employment, but at the cost of disrupting the tranquil existence of southern Calvert County. Business thrived, houses were opened to boarders, but many young people who had entered the services or gone off to higher paying jobs elsewhere. Large numbers of trainees from the ATB sought recreation in a town not equipped for this, but residents did their best to be hospitable. Much about this period has appeared in articles in the past few years in the Bugeye Times, particularly dealing with reenactments in Solomons in the summers of 1998 and 1999.

When the war ended, things began to return more to normal. The ATB closed in 1945 and war work ceased at the shipyard. To fill the slack, the yard built nine large commercial fishing boats for companies on the Gulf of Mexico, as well as several sailing yachts and one large motor yacht. Management saw a market for low cost cruisers to appeal to a new interest in recreational boating, and so turned to the production of Cruis-Alongs. Several hundred were built between 1946 and 1949. The boatbuilding industry was still supporting the Solomons area.

Other commercial interests began to appear slowly, and recreational fishing and boating returned; in 1946 the Solomons Island Yacht Club (now in a new building) resumed its sponsorship of an annual regatta. It appeared that Solomons would recapture the spirit of earlier days.  

Suggested Readings: Space has limited this review to a few highlights of each decade, but the Calvert Marine Museum has produced several publications that provide more detailed information about the history of the Solomons area. A list of these is now on the museum’s site on the Internet at www.calvertmarinemuseum.com. Those who lack access to the Internet may request a reading list from the museum’s library by writing to P. O. Box 97, Solomons, MD 20688. Many of the publications can be found in local libraries in Southern Maryland.
IN LIEU OF FLOWERS?
By Kay McClellan and Linda McGilvery

This is a story which is yet to be written. As volunteers, we have gotten to know many volunteers, employees, and museum supporters. Sadly, one day, one of our favorite people passes away. We want to do something. Why not send a memorial gift to the museum?

Soon after its founding in 1970 the museum was fortunate in having a very dedicated volunteer by the name of James (Jim) H. Buys. Jim was the second chairman of the Calvert County Historical Society’s museum committee, the group that after 1979 became the museum’s Board of Governors. He passed away in 1982. Many memorial gifts to the museum were made in Jim’s name. In 1983 the Board of Governors voted to use the memorial funds donated in Jim’s name to commission Chesapeake Bay marine artist John M. Barber to paint “Buying Oysters at Drum Point.” This interesting painting depicts our cruise boat and former oyster buyboat, Wm. B. Tennison, buying oysters from the Solomons-built bugeye Apollo at Drum Point with the lighthouse in the background. Today, Jim’s memory is perpetuated in the beautiful painting as part of the permanent collections and is displayed in the museum lounge. Jim is further remembered whenever prints of the Barber painting are sold: prints are still available and the proceeds continue to support the museum. (Any interested purchasers should contact the Museum Store.)

Supporters, volunteers, friends, and relatives can make memorial gifts to CMM. Past memorial gifts have been designated for use in such programs as paleontology, the estuarium, the Drum Point Lighthouse, the museum library, the Wm. B. Tennison, and the Small Craft Center — but they may be designated for any area of interest to the donor.

In the museum lounge you may page through the “Memorial Books” in which each person memorialized has a special page where donors’ names are recorded. There are more than fifty friends so memorialized to date in these books. For a person who has given much of himself or herself to the museum or has demonstrated a great concern for CMM, a memorial gift seems to be a fitting way to be remembered.

IN LIEU OF FLOWERS? Please send memorial gifts to the Calvert Marine Museum, P. O. Box 97, Solomons, Maryland 20688.