Searching For The Past –
NEW UNDERWATER EXPLORATIONS ON COMMODORE BARNEY’S FLOTILLA

By Donald C. Shomette

(Editor’s note: From 1977 through 1980 the Calvert Marine Museum and Nautical Underwater Archaeological Associates of Upper Marlboro, Maryland, planned and surveyed a number of underwater sites along the Patuxent River in an effort to locate whatever might remain of the 1814 Chesapeake Flotilla of Commodore Joshua Barney. The historic action of Barney and his flotilla largely had been neglected in local history, but was a logical research effort for the relatively new marine museum in Solomons and its new director, Dr. Ralph Eshelman. Through the use of newer technology for underwater exploration and with federal and state support, significant research results were produced, as well as artifacts for an exhibit at the museum. The research results were reported in the Bugeye Times in 1979 and in two works published by the museum in 1981: Flotilla: Battle for the Patuxent, by Donald G. Shomette, and War on the Patuxent: A Catalog of Artifacts, by Fred W. Hopkins and Donald Shomette. A new effort is now under way to study the Barney flotilla, and plans for this effort are described in the following article.)

Eight months after President James Madison opened hostilities in America’s “Second War of Independence” with Great Britain, known to history as the War of 1812, a fleet of Royal Navy warships entered the Chesapeake Bay and commenced an unprecedented campaign of looting and burning against the Maryland-Virginia Tidewater. The United States Navy, blockaded in the Patapsco and Elizabeth Rivers, was unable to provide protection for the beleaguered farms and villages of the region. In 1813, Captain Joshua Barney, a Revolutionary War naval hero and commander of the famed Baltimore privateer Rosie, submitted a plan to the Navy Department calling for the construction of a flying squadron of light-draft gunboats and barges armed with heavy long guns or carronades. He envisioned a fast force capable of shadowing, pursuing, and engaging British landing parties in the shoal water of the Tidewater, out of the range of the heavy guns of the British frigates and ships-of-the-line, thereby providing a reasonable defense of Maryland waters.

The Navy Department approved the bold plan, and Barney was appointed commandant of the fleet, dubbing the “Chesapeake Flotilla.” Barney was assigned eight barges being built in Baltimore, the sloop Scorpion, gunboats Nos. 137 and 138, the row galley Vigilant, and three barges built for the protection of Baltimore Harbor. Contracts were let to Thomas Kemp, in Baltimore, and Thomas Spencer, in St. Michaels, to construct additional barges. Other vessels were to be built at the Washington Navy Yard. The force of eighteen vessels that ultimately sailed was to be manned entirely by Marylanders, including both African-American freemen and slaves as well as whites.

In May 1814, Barney sailed from Baltimore with his fleet to meet the British at Tangier Island, but below the mouth of the Patuxent he encountered a superior enemy force and retreated up the Patuxent, eventually retiring to the shallow fastness of St. Leonard Creek. Although on June 8, 9, and 10 the Royal Navy dispatched wave after wave of gunboats, schooners, and barges armed with a new weapon of terror, the Congreve rocket, Barney stood fast. Unable to defeat

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MUSEUM ADMISSION FEES INCREASE

Effective on June 2, the museum’s admission fees increased. The admission for adults is now $5.00 and for seniors $4.00; the fee for children aged 5 to 12 remains at $2.00 (under 5 free). These fees include the exhibits in the Exhibition Building, the marsh walk — including the otters! — the boat basin, the Drum Point Lighthouse, and the J. C. Lore Oyster House. There is no charge for admission to the Discovery Room, the lower changing exhibit area, or the Museum Store. Members of the Calvert Marine Museum Society are admitted free, so consider a museum membership — applications are available at the admissions desk.
Rain, wind, and threat of hail could not deter twenty enthusiastic CMM volunteer and staff members from conducting this year’s yard and bake sale on May 3 as scheduled. It was a record breaker, netting over $1,500, even after the extra expense of a tent necessitated by the weather.

A BIG THANK YOU goes to all the donors who provided the yard sale items and the delicious baked goods. The event simply would not be possible without your generous contributions. We will again be collecting throughout the year, so please set aside your superfluous but still useful items for next year’s yard sale. Call Leslie Scher Brown on 410-326-2042 to arrange for pickup.

Did you ever wonder what happens to unsold items? Recipients include S.M.I.I.E., a thrift shop and food pantry just south of the museum, and Catholic Charities. Nothing is wasted.

Of this year’s proceeds, $1,200 will go to the estuarine biology department to underwrite the last available feature tank. You will be able to visit and point to this tangible evidence of your generosity. The remainder can be used to finance the up-front expenses of next year’s yard sale.

(Linda McGilvery)

CHESAPEAKE LIGHTHOUSES IN PRINT

The current popular interest in lighthouses has reached the Chesapeake Bay in three new books. Pat Vojtech, known for her 1993 book on bay skipjacks, turned her camera and writing skills on the bay’s lighthouses in Lighting the Bay: Tales of Chesapeake Lighthouses, published early this year by Tidewater Publishers ($34.95). This book was followed in late March by Maryland Lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay: An Illustrated History, written by lighthouse historian F. Ross Holland and co-published by the Maryland Historical Trust and the Friends of St. Clement’s Island Museum, Inc. ($32.50). Mr. Holland, a former member of the museum’s Board of Governors who has lectured at CMM, has compiled the first comprehensive history on aids to navigation — past and present, standing and destroyed — in Maryland’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. A third publication, Forgotten Beacons: Lost Lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay, by Linda Turbyville and Patrick Hornberger, will appear in July from Eastwind Publishing ($19.95). In 1995 Ms. Turbyville wrote Bay Beacons: Lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay, also published by Eastwind ($29.95). Although not relating to lighthouses, another new book is The Workboats of Smith Island, by Paula J. Johnson, the museum’s former curator of maritime history, published by Johns Hopkins University Press ($24.95).

These books, and many more on subjects of interest to our members and visitors, are for sale in the Museum Store. Remember that museum members qualify for a 10 percent discount on most items in the store.

STAFF NEWS

The new voice answering the phone at CMM belongs to Cindy Smith, replacing museum secretary Alice Viverette who retired last January. Mrs. Smith, a native of Calvert County, has worked for the county for several years, most recently in the Economic Development Department. She and her family live in the Cove Point area.

Dr. Mike Gottfried, curator of paleontology, will be leaving CMM in August for a new challenge at Michigan State University. Of the achievements of his museum work of the past several years, perhaps the highlight has been the opening in March of the new paleontology exhibit.

Several new staff will be at CMM for the summer. Interpreters are Renee Switzer and Christina Shumate; Jay Switzer is helping with grounds maintenance.

An art scholarship to benefit Calvert High School students has been set up as a memorial to Corey Watts, a former volunteer and son of staff member Jan Hearn. Contributions may be made at any of the local NationsBank offices. Staff and friends have been saddened by the loss of this young man.
WELCOME NEW MEMBERS! Many thanks to the 172 new members who joined the society last quarter! Special thanks to these new premium members: Contributing: V. Charles Donnelly & Deborah Steffen, James & Elizabeth Hildebrand, Rosemary & Walter Locke, Tom Patterson & D. Skolfeld, Joseph & Jean Phelps, John D. Porter, George Howard Post, Mr. & Mrs. Stinson R. Swyers. Sustaining: Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth W. Anderson, Herbert & Alice Behre, Mr. & Mrs. Peter Dobson, Mildred C. Greenslade, Norman & Gloria Hawkes, Anne & Bill Helme, Neal A. Hesselson, Oliver & Florence Keely, Tom & Julie Kemp, Karen & Steve Kratzer, Kim & Janette Petersen. Sustaining Corporate: Nationwide Pharmacy. Corporate Associate: Dr. Frank Triana; O'Malley, Niles, Nylens & Gilmore; Traditional Homes. Corporate Bugeye Society: Ralph's Dodge of Prince Frederick, Solomons Landing.

TAKING MEMBERSHIP TO A HIGHER LEVEL by upgrading were: Jerry & Lynda Bennett, Mr. & Mrs. John Hanson Briscoe, Roland & Jennifer Cochran, Ms. Louann Cook, Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Cooley, Laurence & Roxanne Cumberland, Ralph & Mary Dwan, Ronald & Mary Elwell, Anita & C. L. George, Kathy C. Grimes, Barbara & Ron Hankel, Col. Jay Hanks, James & Darlene Howard, Mr. & Mrs. Houston P. Kidd, Harlyn & Evelyn Knapp, Mr. & Mrs. Gerald LaMarque, Jane Loughran & Tom Moore, Ms. Jennifer Magee, Susan Marcus & Roger Haskins, Mr. & Mrs. Harold Millsaps, Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Nelligan, Mr. & Mrs. Myron Nunn, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Partusch, Mrs. Betty Peterkin, Mrs. Patricia Poole, Dr. & Mrs. John Sadler, Mr. Ray Schleeter & Dr. Mary Borromey, Jan Simmons, Mr. & Mrs. John Simpson Jr., Mr. Lindley Sloan, Mr. & Mrs. Glenn Stephenson, Stefan & Joan Thonnard, Jackie & Fred Victor, Rev. John & Susan Williams, Washburn's Boat Yard, Ken & Vonnie Zeigler.

COOK’S CONUNDRUMS

Common Words

What do the following ten words have in common? (Note: The answer is not obvious. Think creatively.)

BRAID, BRINGING, HOLSTER, LIFT, RISING, ROOT, STAGE, START, TAKE, WARD.

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

MEMBERS’ ANNUAL SUMMER PICNIC!

Saturday, August 23, 5:30 p.m.

A tried-and-true CMM tradition, the members’ summer picnic features music, tennis cruises, games, special tours, and unforgettable fiddler crab races! It also boasts the best food in town — you bring your own picnic supper. We’ll supply beverages and desserts. RSVP by calling 410-326-2042. Respond by August 20 to enter your name in the drawing for our coveted “Homeport Picnic,” a delightful dinner and champagne picnic waiting just for you!

CMM SUCCEEDS IN BUSINESS!

Calvert Marine Museum has welcomed thirty new corporate members to the society since July 1, 1995 — the date the Board of Governors launched our aggressive Corporate Revival Campaign. The campaign ended June 30, 1997.

We could not have succeeded without the help of the Corporate Revival Task Force headed by board member John C. Smith (BGE). Task force members Art Carson (O’Brien Realty), Alicia Felix (Marina Travel Agency), James Kenney (Kenney, Lacer & Sparling, LC), Chris Reynolds (Reynolds & Manning, PA), and George Tilmann (NTA, Inc.) helped staff develop strategies for increasing corporate interest and actively recruited new corporate members.

Please join us in saluting all of our corporate members. Those that joined during the campaign are highlighted: 97.7 “The Bay”; Asbury-Solomons Island; BGE; Back Creek Inn; Bayside Chev-Buick-Geo & Toyota; Bell Atlantic-Md.; Bozick Distributors; Calvert Bank & Trust; Calvert Marina; Carmen’s Gallery; Cather Marine; Chesapeake Publishing Group; Chesapeake Systems Integration; DM Group; Dash In; First National Bank of Maryland; First Virginia Bank-Md.; G. Thomas Daugherty; Heritage Printing & Graphics; Holiday Inn Select Solomons; Jones Communications; K. E. Schrumpf Remodeling & Design; James Kenney; Melvin F. Sykes; Lighthouse Inn; Main Message Center; Marina Travel Agency; Maryland Bank & Trust Company; Mom’s in the Kitchen; Morgan E. Russell; Mutual Fire Insurance; Nationwide Pharmacy; NetsPro; New Bay Times; O’Brien Realty; O’Malley, Miles, Nylens & Gilmore; Penn Jersey Auto; Perkins/PEB; Ralph’s Dodge of Prince Frederick; Reynolds & Manning; Roy Rogers - Gould Restaurants; SMECO; Solomons Island Yacht Club; Solomons Veterinary Clinic; Solomons Landing; Solomons Victorian Inn; Spring Cove Marina; Traditional Homes; Dr. Frank Triana; Twin Shields Golf Club; Washburn’s Boat Yard; Washington Gas-Md.; Woodburn’s Food Market; Zahniser’s, Inc.

(Sybol Cook)
After a quiet winter, the museum enjoyed a number of important activities during the spring of 1997, from the opening of “Treasure from the Cliffs” in March, Patuxent Family Discovery Day in early May, various activities for children and families, two lectures, the Waterside Music Festival in late May, to an Elderhostel and increased visitation in June.

NEW FOSSIL EXHIBIT OPENS

As described in the previous issue, the exhibit “Treasure from the Cliffs: Exploring Marine Fossils” opened with events over a four-day period, March 20 through 23.

WATERSIDE MUSIC SERIES A HUGE SUCCESS

Saturday, May 24, attracted a packed audience of over two thousand onto the museum grounds to enjoy the performances at the Bayside Toyota Waterside Music Series. Following the opening at 7:30 p.m. with blues artist The Mary Ann Redmond Band, the feature performers were the New Orleans blues icons, The Neville Brothers. Blending voice and instrumentation, Charles, Art, Cyril, and Aaron played for ninety minutes to enthusiastic listeners. Support from volunteers and fifteen sponsors from the local business community made the evening successful in raising funds for the museum.
OTHER ACTIVITIES THIS SPRING

Despite a cool and rainy morning, the day attracted many visitors to a variety of activities at CMH. The successful yard and bake sale of the Volunteer Council is reported elsewhere in this issue.

MAY 3 – WET BUT FUN!

DISCOVERY DAY

PATUXENT FAMILY
the Americans in their lair, the British commenced a ruthless campaign of wanton destruction along the Patuxent watershed, as far north as Lower Marlboro. On June 26 Barney launched a brilliant pre-dawn surprise attack and succeeded in driving the British down river and permitting his own squadron to escape up the Patuxent. Two slow gunboats and several merchantmen were left behind and scuttled to prevent capture. Soon afterwards, the British re-entered St. Leonard Creek and destroyed the port of St. Leonard's Town, then located at the head of navigation near the present-day Quaker Swamp.

For the next two months Barney retreated slowly up the river to Benedict, White's Landing, Nottingham, and finally to Pig Point (modern Bristol). In early August the British force on the Patuxent was augmented with the objective of capturing and destroying Washington, using the flotilla as a pretext for moving up the river, and then overland to the capital. As the British advanced, Barney was instructed to scuttle his entire fleet to prevent capture and to proceed with his flotillamen to the defense of Washington. Sixteen of Barney's vessels sank into the mud of the Patuxent, along with fifteen merchantmen and a hired ordnance ship. The British action at Washington in August 1814 is well known.

Within months of the destruction of the flotilla, salvage activities were undertaken, with cannons, anchors, cables, ropes, shot, and small arms recovered. In late June 1815 the few salvaged goods were auctioned off in Baltimore. In the Patuxent, however, the remains of the Chesapeake Flotilla and the merchant fleet scuttled with it slipped ever deeper into the river silt.

The 1977 to 1980 efforts mentioned in the note at the beginning of this article recovered a veritable treasure trove of artifactual material from a sunken vessel lying beneath nearly five feet of silt. Ninety percent of the vessel was amazingly intact, and the artifacts were in an excellent state of preservation owing to the oxygen-free environment beneath the river mud in which they had been immersed. Artifacts removed were conserved, cataloged, and prepared for exhibition. (Many can be seen today at the museum.) The vessel proved to be a warship which, after extensive research, has been determined to be Barney's flagship, the USS Scorpion.

The present Chesapeake Flotilla Project will take up again the search for Barney's vessels, employing the latest advances in scientific technology and research, education, and exhibition methods to more fully excavate, document, evaluate, conserve, and interpret the extant remains. The project will employ such innovative technologies as sub-sediment radar and ultrasonic mapping systems. Polysulfide casting of sections of an entire vessel are planned to facilitate dry-land study of ship's architectural features and for exhibition purposes. Digitization of select research and archival data will be made available to scholars, students, and the public through cyberspace. The principal state program agency for the project is the Maryland Historical Trust, through its Maryland Maritime Archaeology Program and Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum. Many other public and private organizations are involved in the work or its funding.

The author of this article has been designated the program director to work with the various agencies and individuals involved and to administer all field activities. In December 1995, the United States Navy began preliminary aerial remote sensing survey work for the project; the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission funded the construction of a replica of one of the flotilla's fifty-foot war barges (the completed replica was on display in CMM's boat basin at Patuxent River Appreciation Days in October 1996), and the author has carried out an aerial infrared photographic survey of key areas in which the remains of the flotilla are buried. Extensive work is planned for this summer.

Supported by a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust, two simultaneous but separate field operations will be conducted from late June to early August. The completion of work started in 1996 will be carried out by project engineer Eldon Volkmer, a veteran of the 1977-1980 underwater survey of the Patuxent. With his team and logistical support from the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, a magnetometry search will seek to locate two fifty-foot war barges in the vicinity of what was Queen Anne's Town, once a bustling port on the upper reaches of the river. Additional work should pinpoint the location of several merchant ships near old St. Leonard's Town, destroyed by the British in July 1814. The team will also seek to define the exact shape of all of the buried wrecks, collect wood samples for analysis, and conduct hands-on investigations of all visual targets.

At the same time, the condition and identification of two wrecks, possibly gunboats Nos. 137 and 138, will be determined by East Carolina University's Program in Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology. This program, and the sixteen graduate students and advisors who will participate, will be under the supervision of nationally recognized marine archaeologist Dr. Lawrence Babits. The university will also provide vessels and field equipment valued at $100,000. Experimentation with the polysulfide casting process will be supervised by Betty Seifert, conservator of the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, a new facility to be completed this summer. Survey, logistical, and volunteer

Artifacts from Chesapeake Flotilla in 1980. Photo by Tim Mihursky
support will be provided by the Calvert Soil Conservation District Office, the Second District Volunteer Rescue Squad (Prince Frederick), and the Maritime Archaeological and Historical Society.

Those interested in keeping up with the progress of the Chesapeake Flotilla Project may request to be put on the mailing list of the project’s newsletter, Sails & Oars!, by sending their name and address to: Exhibit Services Program, Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, 10515 Mackall Road, St. Leonard, Maryland, 20685. More extensive information will be available at the first National Annual War of 1812 Symposium to be held on September 27, 1997, at the University of Baltimore’s Langsdale Auditorium. This all-day event will be free to the public. Further information may be obtained by calling the author at 301-855-5280.

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Donald G. Shomette, a research associate of the museum, is a renowned underwater archaeologist and author. Retired from the Library of Congress, he is now devoting much of his time to the Chesapeake Flotilla Project. In addition to the two books mentioned at the head of this article, he has written Ghost Fleet of Mallows Bay and Other Tales of the Lost Chesapeake; Pirates on the Chesapeake; Raid on America: The Dutch Naval Campaign of 1672-1674; Shipwrecks on the Chesapeake; Tidewater Time Capsule: History Beneath the Patuxent; and a number of archaeological surveys.

CMM’S MAINE’S MARITIME HERITAGE AND FALL FOLIAGE TOUR
September 26-28

Members and friends are invited to enjoy a three-day, two-night trip to New England to tour several maritime-related sites in Massachusetts and Maine, with overnight stays in Portland and Kennebunkport. The motorcoach tour will leave from and return to Logan Airport in Boston, and will be guided by Bud Warren, experienced teacher and formerly the Education Coordinator at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath. An added bonus should be the fall foliage in New England.

The cost of the trip will be $495 per person, based on twenty participants (single supplement $110). Airfare to Boston is not included, and a surcharge may be added if the number of participants falls below twenty. Call Leslie Scher Brown on 410-326-2042 for further information and an application form.

CMM PUBLICATIONS WIN KUDOS

Two museum publications were recognized this spring by awards. The booklet, Solomons Island and Vicinity: An Illustrated History and Walking Tour, by curator of maritime history Richard Dodds, was recognized by the Calvert County Commissioners for one of the annual preservation awards for individuals or projects that preserve the county’s cultural heritage. Through Mr. Dodds’s efforts, a great deal of local and oral history of the Solomons area has been documented and made available to our many visitors. For the second year in a row, the museum’s newsletter, Bugeye Times, and its producer, Heritage Printing and Graphics of Leonardtown, were recognized by the Printing Industries of Maryland as Best of Category in their 1997 Print Quality Award competition.

FOLLOW THE PROGRESS ON THE FLOTILLA!

CMM members are offered an opportunity to see the field excavation of one of the Chesapeake Flotilla gunboats on St. Leonard Creek during two special cruises on the Wm. B. Tennison in July:

Tuesday, July 15, at 9:30 a.m.
Tuesday, July 22, at 11:00 a.m.

The trip will take about 1.5 hours each way, with two hours spent at the site. An introduction to the project will be provided en route, and an archaeologist from the project will join the group aboard at the site to explain the latest discoveries. LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED ON BOARD. Cost is $25.00 per person, with pre-registration required. To receive a registration form, call the Education Department on 410-326-8217.
THE SOLOMONS ISLAND MODEL BOAT CLUB

By Don Miller

The origin of the Solomons Island Model Boat Club (SIMBC) lies in the modeling and sailing interests of the museum's master carver emeritus, James LeRoy "Pepper" Langley. The club was formed in 1980 with "Pepper," his son Jimmy Langley, Gordon Bupp, George "Rip" Van Winkle, George "Barney" Woods, and Carroll Lusby as the charter members. "Pepper"'s design for a model of a Chesapeake Bay skipjack was translated into a standard set of plans, then into a working model named the Lady Katie. Carroll Lusby formalized the plans, Gordon Bupp brought radio and electronics expertise, and "Rip" Van Winkle was the resident engineer. By the end of 1980 there were six radio-controlled sailboats racing in the museum's creek and at the Chesapeake Ranch Club. SIMBC grew rapidly from this modest beginning. Charles Pelzer, the first secretary, also began The Skipwriter, the club's newsletter, in December 1981. Much of the information in this article is from a special anniversary issue of The Skipwriter which was richly contributed by Mr. Pelzer. The next issue of the newsletter will be published in July of this year, edited by the author of this article.

The club is dedicated to preserving the maritime heritage of the Chesapeake Bay by building and operating radio-controlled model boats. The skipjack was selected as the initial club boat because of its historic significance on the bay as the oyster "drudger," commonly used in Maryland to dredge for oysters since early in the twentieth century. The model skipjack is a member of the Vintage Model Class of the American Association of Museums. The club meets each second and fourth Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to noon, year round. The skipjack races are regular attractions on alternate Sundays in spring, early summer, and fall in either the museum's boat basin or in Back Creek beyond the Drum Point Lighthouse. Races usually start a 2:00 p.m. when the Wm. B. Tennison departs for her public cruise. Visitors to the museum enjoy seeing the unusual models race the triangular course. Pat Miller starts the races, counts the laps, and judges the finish. She's also the club's secretary and treasurer. The club's dues are $10 initiation and $8 annually thereafter. Membership is required as a condition for admission to the club.

The club has recently begun building radio-controlled models of the deep-vee "deadrise" workboats that populate the bay as crabs, oystertongers, trot-line fishers, headboats, and clam diggers. These are mostly built from plans of the John A. Ryder, which is in the museum's small craft shed, and five are currently built or under construction. These models will be raced on a precision steering course of buoys in the boat basin in July and August while the wind is normally too light to sail the skipjacks. A long-range goal of the club is to design a small, but fast, electric-powered model of the racing boats that used to race in Solomons Harbor in the 1930s. Perhaps young modelers who are experienced in racing radio-controlled model cars will form the nucleus of this activity.

The club's meetings. The club extends an invitation to one and all to join the use of the boat basin, docks, and creek are essential to the continued success of the club. The members of the SIMBC are deeply grateful to the Calvert Marine Museum for sponsoring the club for these past sixteen years. Use of the museum's wood shop, the access to "Pepper" and Jimmy Langley, and the use of the boat basin, docks, and creek are essential to the continued success of the club. The club extends an invitation to one and all to join in the fun and sport of building and operating radio-controlled models that preserve the maritime history of the Chesapeake Bay. Contact Don or Pat Miller at 410-326-6062 for membership information. Better yet, come to one of the Saturday meetings and see the fun for yourself!