Editor's Note: One of the principal areas of interest of the Calvert Marine Museum is the maritime history of the Patuxent River and related areas, including Solomons. Staff members and others have made considerable effort to document this maritime history, as evidenced by publications and by many exhibits in the museum and in the recently opened Lore Oyster House. Efforts have been made — and are continuing — to document more thoroughly the shipbuilding industry in the area. Articles in this issue of the Bugeye Times and in future issues will report on some of the findings to date, although there is still much to learn. It is hoped that some of the readers of the Bugeye Times will have information to add to that which has been gathered from a variety of published, documentary, and personal sources.

Among the bounties of the Chesapeake Bay are its natural harbors — appealing both to the first settlers in Virginia and Maryland, and attracting others during the later centuries. On the Patuxent River the earliest centers of maritime activity were up river, at locations where most of the crops were available for shipping. The confluence of the Patuxent River and the Bay, however, was used from the times of early settlement as a refuge for ships using the Bay, since the river's mouth provided a natural harbor of renown. Although growth was slow in starting in the area, its attributes were known and attracted maritime interests, continuing — as we know — even today.

Solomons owes its appeal largely to the physical features of its water area. An outer harbor within Drum Point is two miles long and one and one-half miles wide, with an unobstructed entrance, but offering significant protection from storms. Water depth is sixty to eighty feet in the middle, shoaling gradually to thirty feet a few hundred yards from the shore. Two miles in from its mouth the river bends northward around the present Solomons Island, forming a second reach of deep, sheltered water, followed by a second bend in the river with still a third body of water. All this adds another five miles of anchorage with depths varying from twenty-six to seventy feet. Creeks that bound Solomons Island also provide ideal anchorage for small boats.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this configuration of land and water attracted interest in the mid-nineteenth century when the markets for the products of the Chesapeake Bay area were increasing, due to a post-war boom, new technology (canning techniques), the growth of railroads, and continuing expansion into the West. Isaac Solomon, an oyster canning entrepreneur from Baltimore, in the mid-1860's bought what was called in his deed "Sandy Island" (earlier, Somervell's Island or Johnson's Island) and established there a large oyster cannery around 1867. Taking advantage of the island's strategic location and ready access to the Patuxent's

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and the nearby Bay's plentiful oyster beds, Isaac Solomon hired his own dredge boats, captains, and crews to ensure an adequate supply of oysters for his cannery. A shipyard was established by the company around 1869 to maintain this fleet. The community which sprang up around the cannery became something of a boom town, soon to be known as Solomons Island.

By 1880, the Solomon fishing fleet consisted of nearly 500 vessels [Calvert Independent, September 23, 1954], many built locally. In the next two decades of the nineteenth century, other builders were attracted to the area and built a number of sailing vessels that were used by the men engaged in various maritime activities. As the reputation of the Solomons Island yards spread, larger and different types of vessels (including power) were built. In the early twentieth century, however, the demand for sailing and oystering vessels declined, but at least one builder - M. M. Davis and Son - remained active into World War I and produced vessels for the war effort. Following that war the Davis yard was the only one of consequence remaining at Solomons. In the next two decades the products of the yard changed in character - principally tugs, menhaden fishing boats, and pleasure yachts - but the yard continued to operate even after it passed from Davis ownership. World War II brought defense work again, but the post-War period saw more changes in ownership and the eventual closing of the yard.

It is unfortunate that there is no complete record of the various vessels built at Solomons. During the late nineteenth century registering of boats was generally limited to larger vessels and those in commercial use. Although some records of the shipyards have survived, they are far from complete and do not contain full lists of vessels built. Some information has come from the memory of individuals with connections with the shipyards or the families of the builders, but this information is relatively scarce. For the period of the 1870's onward, the best published source for information on vessels engaged in any type of marine trade is the series Merchant Vessels of the United States, an annual compilation of vessels that have been documented under laws of the United States first enacted in the late 1860's. The museum is fortunate in having in its library a rather full set of this series, as well as the series of annual volumes of the Lloyd's Register of American Yachts, an invaluable source of information about pleasure yachts in use during this century. Although the information in both of these sources varies in completeness over the years, it is usually possible to identify the name(s) of the vessel, its size, type of power, owners, and the date and place it was built. For yachts, the names of the designer and builder are also given in Lloyd's Register.

Many hours have been spent by museum staff in searching through these volumes and through documentary sources to attempt to identify vessels built in Solomons or other places in southern Calvert County. This research has so far identified nearly 300 vessels built from the 1870's until about 1960. These data, along with other information about the shipyards, will be used as the basis for articles on the principal yards or on specific vessels. A compilation of available information about these vessels is being edited for publication. (A briefer list by vessel name - including also the type, date built, and builder [when known] - is now available from the museum for Locations of the shipyards of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

1. James T. Marsh (1872 - 1917)
2. M. M. Davis (1875 - 1918) - This is believed to have been the location of the earlier Isaac Solomon yard (1869 - 1875).
3. M. M. Davis (1913 - 1973) - The Davis yard moved here to accommodate larger boats.
4. Thomas R. Moore (1880 - 1906)
BOATBUILDING AT SOLOMONS

$2.00 for an electrostatic print.) It is recognized, of course, that there have been hundreds of small boats of various styles that have been built by the area’s watermen in the past hundred years. These can never be identified. It is also recognized that there may be significant omissions in the compilation of vessels, but it is hoped that publication may serve to stimulate interest in this important facet of local maritime history and bring additions and corrections to the list.

THE RETURN OF THE BUGEYE Louise Travers

Something of an “event” in local maritime history occurred on October 3, 1984, when one of the oldest existing vessels built at Solomons returned home, almost, in fact, to the very spot where she had been built nearly ninety years ago. The “event” was unpublicized, so only a few members of the staff of the museum were on hand to watch the arrival of the bugeye Louise Travers as she was towed into Solomons harbor and taken up Back Creek to the Calvert Marina where she now awaits documentation.

The Louise Travers was built in 1896 at the James T. Marsh shipyard on Mill Creek. Marsh began building bugeyes in 1879 and is reputed to be the first to use a frame-and-plank method instead of the traditional log or “chunk” method used up to that time. His first bugeye was the Carrie, but at least fourteen more bugeyes are known to have been built in his yard in the next two decades. Except for the Louise Travers, no other Marsh bugeye is known to exist; in fact, the only other Marsh bugeye for which the museum has any documentation is the George B. Faunce, built in 1887, for which the dimensions and lines have been taken from a half model. This half model is on exhibit at CMM, thanks to a loan from the Radcliffe Maritime Museum in Baltimore.

As a bugeye, the Louise Travers was used for some years as an oyster dredge, sailing out of Crisfield and Baltimore. In 1930, while owned by Henry W. Ward, she was converted to freight use and an engine added. Until the early 1980’s she seems to have been used variously for freight service and as an oyster buyboat, operating from Crisfield, Newport News, or Cape Charles. In 1938 she achieved some distinction by appearing in a photograph in the National Geographic Magazine in an article on Washington and its environs. By the early 1980’s, however, her active working days ended when she was bought by James Byus of Washington, D. C., who moved her to the Maine Avenue waterfront and used her as a floating vegetable stand.

When Mr. Byus decided recently that he needed a larger and more satisfactory vessel for his stand, he offered the Louise Travers to the museum, and this offer was accepted. Through the cooperation of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, which provided the services of its tug Big Lou, the Louise Travers was returned to Solomons. Although the condition of the boat is too deteriorated for restoration, the museum plans to enlist the aid of experts to document this rare example of an early frame-and-plank bugeye. Whatever her eventual fate, the Louise Travers will have ended her days at her “home” in Solomons, and will have provided some invaluable documentation for the maritime history records of the museum.

(One of the best sources of information about Bugeyes is M. V. Brewington’s Book Chesapeake Bay Log Canoes and Bugeyes. Copies are available for consultation in the museum’s library and in local public libraries. Copies may also be bought from the museum store.)
Fisherman's Journals Describe Bay's Bounty

Grant Received to Produce Fisheries Catalogue

The museum has been awarded a grant of $54,810 from the National Endowment for the Humanities for an eighteen-month project to begin January 1, 1985. The grant will finance the preparation and publication of a book to accompany the new exhibit, "Seasons of Abundance, Seasons of Want: Making a Living from the Waters of the Patuxent," which opened June 30, 1984, at the J. C. Lore & Sons Oyster House.

The book will consist of two parts. The first will be a descriptive catalogue of approximately one hundred artifacts selected from the museum's extensive collection of commercial fisheries gear and equipment. This collection consists of a wide range of artifacts including such large and familiar items as the 1899 oyster buyboat Wm. B. Tennison, as well as smaller items ranging from wooden net shuttles to an iron pot for tarring fish nets, from oyster-shucking knives to shuckers' aprons and stalls, from oyster cans to a canning machine to an oyster shell crushing mill, and from hand-made oak-splint eel pots to modern wire eel pots.

The second part of the book will consist of three illustrated essays focusing on the various occupational groups within the region's seafood industries. These essays will also place the commercial fisheries artifacts in their historical and cultural contexts. Writers of the essays will be Dr. Terry Sharrer, a historian at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American
Grant Received  (Continued from Page 4)

History, and Dr. George Carey, former Maryland State Folklorist, now professor of English at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Dr. Carey worked at the museum on the Patuxent River Folklife & Oral History Project in 1982, and in 1983 on the background research for the exhibit, “Built to Work: Building Deadrise Workboats in Southern Maryland.” The third writer will be staff folklorist Paula Johnson, who will also direct this publication project. Dr. Alan Jabbour, Director of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, will contribute an introduction to the book.

The preparation of manuscripts and the descriptive catalog is expected to take one year. Actual publication of the book will take another six months to a year.

Captain Jim Leaves Tennison

High among the attractions of a visit to CMM is a trip on the Wm. B. Tennison, either around the harbor of Solomons or up the Patuxent River. These trips have been offered by the museum since the summer season of 1979, soon after the museum acquired the Tennison. The Tennison has also served as a floating “ambassador” for the museum during Chesapeake Appreciation Days, at Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, at St. Mary’s City, and other places.

For the past five seasons the skipper of the Tennison has been Captain Jim Tallant, whose unfailing good humor (in every sense!) has added to the enjoyment of these trips. Captain Jim, a retired Navy officer with extensive maritime experience, has decided to enjoy a full retirement, thus leaving his “command” of the Tennison. His service was recognized by museum staff and friends at a dinner in December.

Patuxent River Appreciation Days, 1984, saw activity at CMM on water as well as land. A highlight of October 13 was the entrance of the 360th Anniversary Flotilla into Solomons harbor, with several vessels making their way to the museum’s waterfront. The photograph above shows the Fifty-Fifty (right), the Maryland Governor’s yacht, docked at the Drum Point Lighthouse, while the skipjack Lady Katie (left) proceeds into the museum’s new boat basin. Governor Hughes was among the estimated 25,000 people attending this popular, two-day annual event.

CMS Yule Party

Acknowledgements

The success of the members’ Yule Party ’84 was due to the combined efforts of the museum staff, regular volunteers, and special volunteers recruited just for this program. Once again the staff organizers of this event owe heartfelt “thanks” to those who donated refreshments, helped to decorate the museum and the Drum Point Lighthouse, assisted with the hayrides, and saw to the smooth running of the evening’s activities.

SELECTED ACQUISITIONS

CMM is grateful to many people and organizations for interesting and significant donations that strengthen the museum’s programs and collections. An excellent example is the Louise Travers, subject of a separate article in this issue, donated by Mr. James Byus. Another vessel donated was the skipjack Marie Theresa, built in 1906, and donated by Mr. Laurence Lipscomb. This twenty-seven foot “pirate” skipjack was used to dredge oysters illegally from private oyster bars. She is being restored as a project of the Patuxent Small Craft Guild, in cooperation with Zahniser’s Marina.

Two other acquisitions related to Solomons-built vessels were: (1) Mr. Michael Phillips has given a model of the tug Esther Phillips, built in 1908 by the M. M. Davis yard; (2) Mr. Donald Sherwood has donated photographs, plans, and correspondence relating to the building of his yacht Seawitch in 1927 by M. M. Davis and Son. This yacht was the first to be built by Davis from a design of Philip Rhodes, noted marine architect, and established the yacht’s reputation for high-quality yachtwork. This significant collection was made possible through the efforts of Geoffrey Footner.

Mrs. Jefferson generously donated a watercolor by John Whorf entitled “Punt Gunner.”

The museum’s film collection has been augmented by a gift from the U. S. Navy of a copy of its 1969 film “NOLTFSolomons Story,” documenting the history of the Naval Surface Weapons Facility here.

Tom Pierce of “Trader Bill’s,” Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, has donated the jaws of the unusual modern shark Hemipristis. Although Hemipristis is a common fossil shark found at Calvert Cliffs, it occurs today only in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. (See the article in the Fall 1984 Bugeye Times for more about this shark.)

New CMS Member Benefits

For 1985

Members of the Calvert Marine Society already enjoy a number of benefits as part of their support of the museum. New benefits in 1985 for “Family” and “Contributing” members will include passes for use when taking guests to the Drum Point Lighthouse and the Lore Oyster House. “Supporting” and higher membership categories will receive individual passes for cruises on the Tennison. Renewal notices will include full details of all benefits.
There are still a number of copies available of the limited and numbered edition of the lithographic print "Buying Oysters at Drum Point," prepared from the original oil painting of John M. Barber, ASMA. Depicted in the print are the buyboat Wm. B. Tennison and the skipjack Apollo, with the Drum Point Lighthouse in the background.

Prints numbered up to 25 (some are still available) are priced at $300.00 each, of which $200.00 is tax deductible and will go toward meeting the NEH challenge grant. Higher numbered prints are priced at $100.00 each. Handling and postage are $6.00.

This is an unusual opportunity to obtain an excellent print of the work of this noted marine artist — and also to support the museum!

Calvert Marine Museum's First Annual "Corporate Caper" Was a Smashing Success

Recent issues of the Bugeye Times have reported on the valuable — and growing — support for the museum from the local business community. To recognize this support the museum held its first annual "Corporate Caper" for those businesses that have shown their support through memberships, donations, and other gifts. Fourteen businesses were represented from four counties.

Guests arriving on a balmy October evening found a most inviting scene at the museum's new boat basin. Model skipjacks, sailed by Solomons Island Model Boat Club members Paul Bartlett, Ron Cibulay, and Bob Ray, entertained the corporate members, while Robert Quarles, a local waterman, shucked oysters under the Drum Point Lighthouse. With a backdrop of historic boats, William Taylor, The Dinner Designer, prepared a candlelight dinner entitled "The Bounty of the Bay," with the buffet and guest tables featuring decoys, oyster shells, and marsh grasses for centerpieces. Traditional fiddle and folk music was provided by the Southern Annex.