Drum Point Lighthouse - Its Origins Revisited

By Richard J. Dodds, Curator of Maritime History

At the time the Drum Point Lighthouse was moved to the Calvert Marine Museum in 1975, volunteer researchers began gathering information on the history of the lighthouse. The National Archives in Washington provided the main source for this documentation. The results were incorporated into the museum's excellent pamphlet, The Drum Point Lighthouse, and provide the basis for what we know of its history today. This article is the result of a reexamination of this early work, combined with new research, particularly on the origins of the lighthouse. Highlights from the surviving station logbooks provide some additional insight on one of Maryland's most distinctive buildings.

“The Necessity of a Light at This Point is Very Great”

A report by Lt. William D. Porter to the Secretary of the Treasury, Levi Woodbury, in 1838, provides the earliest reference to establishing a navigational aid at Drum Point.1 Lt. Porter urged that a beacon-light be placed on Drum Point, at the mouth of the Patuxent River:

The necessity of a light at this point is very great, as all vessels bound up or down the Chesapeake put in at this place during the winter to seek protection from floating ice; and as the entrance is formed by a low sand spit, which cannot be seen at night, vessels are often obliged to anchor outside the above mentioned point until daylight, and, in consequence, are often driven ashore in heavy and adverse winds.

At this time, nearby Solomons Island, or Sandy Island as it was then known, had only one house; it was not until 1870 that Isaac Solomon opened his cannery and shipyard.

No apparent action was taken on Porter’s recommendation. In 1843, however, the value of Drum Point as a potential light station was again suggested in a report on Chesapeake Bay aids to navigation written by Henry Prince to Secretary of the Treasury John Spencer.2 In addition to its value in creating a harbor of refuge, stated Prince,

The Light House might combine with its usefulness to the commercial community, the service of aiding in the protection of the Province, as it certainly is the most proper place to station an officer of the Customs to observe the transactions of the many vessels which frequent, and take shelter in the Harbor.

This recommendation, like the earlier one, elicited little response on the part of the Treasury Department. Action was not taken until 1853, when Lt. A.M. Pennock of the Light House Board again urged the board to take steps to build a lighthouse.3 On August 3, 1854, a congressional appropriation for lighthouses, lightships, buoys, etc., included $5,000 for a lighthouse on Drum Point.4

Events did not proceed as planned, however. Federal law required that clear title to the intended site be obtained and the consent of the state legislature in which the site was located be received before any public money was spent. Towards this end the Maryland General Assembly, on March 3, 1856, passed An Act Relative to the Establishment of a Light-House on Drum Point, at the Mouth of the Patuxent River, in Calvert County, and to Cede to the United States the Jurisdiction of the State of Maryland in, to, and Over a Site for the Same. The act appointed Alexander Somerville of Calvert County and Isaac Denison of the City of Baltimore as commissioners to ascertain and fix a fair value on any site, at or near Drum Point, selected by an agent of the Light House Board. A limit of ten acres was set by the state. As it turned out, jurisdiction was never transferred.

Drum Point Lighthouse, circa 1907. This early view of the lighthouse was thought to be nineteenth century, but recent evidence points to a later date. Just visible in the lantern is the narrow dark sector that warned mariners of the shoal off Sandy Point from 1899 to 1911. The platform underneath the lighthouse was probably not added until 1899. Keeper James Locke Weems may be the taller of the two men standing on the walkway. (Copied from a postcard owned by Mrs. Philip D. Lines)

LATE NEWS

There have been two staff appointments this fall: Karen E. Peterson will fill the curator of education vacancy left by Craig De Tamble. Ms. Peterson was most recently the site director of Sunnyside, a nineteenth century historic house in Tarrytown, New York. Mrs. Paula Bohaska returned to CMM as an aquarist, a duty she performed several years ago before the development of the present Estuarium.

Several new books of possible interest have appeared recently. A rather thorough study, entitled Chesapeake Skipjacks, has been written by Pat Vojtech and includes numerous color photographs. Published by Tidewater Publishers, the book sells for $29.95. Another Tidewater publication is John Page Williams's Chesapeake Almanac, 236 pp., $14.95. CMM member James E. Ablard has published History of the Chesapeake Ranch Estates, 131 pp., $14.75 plus tax. These books are available at the CMM museum store, except that by Jim Ablard, for which call him on 586-0093.

It's still not too late to join CMM's "Maritime England" trip in spring 1994. Call Lord Addison Travel, 1-800-326-0170, for details. CMM will benefit from your travel!
FOSSIL FACTS
BY SANDY ROBERTS

THE MIRACULOUS OVUM ANGUINUM

The Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23 to 79), in his Natural History, expressed great interest in mysterious eggs which the ancient Druids of Gaul claimed were formed by a midsummer gathering of twisting and twining snakes. These snakes would exude a frothy foam from which was created a ball-shaped egg (Ovum anguinum). Writhing and hissing, they would toss the egg high in the air. This egg, if stolen on Midsummer's Eve, was said to possess miraculous curative powers. To retain these powers, however, it was absolutely necessary that the egg be caught in the air and never allowed to touch the earth. Whoever would obtain the egg must leap across the mass of coiling snakes, catch the falling egg in a cloth, dash to the nearest river, plunge in, and swim across before stopping for a breath. The furiously pursuing snakes presumably could not swim. Ownership of an Ovum anguinum guaranteed lifelong protection from “poisons and pestilential vapors.” From Pliny’s description, it is obvious that Ovum anguinum referred to a fossil sea urchin, although he did not give enough evidence to identify precisely which species.

Through the ages, fossil urchins have been worn to insure victory in battle and to win disputes. They have been licked, rubbed on the skin, and, when powdered and mixed with water or wine, taken internally to cure bladder (three full glasses recommended), gall, and kidney stones. One fossil urchin, Echino marinae, found in the chalk pits of Kent, England, and filled with “fine, pure chalk,” was used well into the nineteenth century by British seamen as a remedy for “subduing the humour of the stomach.” More locally, fossil sea urchins (Echinocardium marladense) are known from the Miocene deposits of Calvert Cliffs, where they are rare and highly sought-after finds.

TAX CHANGES FOR 1994

CMM’s Development Office has been watching recent changes in the tax laws affecting donations. Many of these, generally effective after January 1, 1994, have been reported in the press.

Tickets and services: when any charity offers a service, ticket, or auction item (a quid pro quo contribution) at a cost of $75.00 or more, the charity must advise the contributor in writing of the value of the good or service that cannot be claimed as a contribution deductible for federal income tax purposes. Token goods or services or those without market value are not reportable. Separate payments made at different times of the year for separate functions will not be aggregated, but IRS will develop regulations to prevent abuse. Charities that do not disclose the required information may be subject to penalties. (Purchases without a charitable element — such as goods from the museum store — are not involved in this requirement since they are not deductible for income tax purposes.)

Contributions in excess of $250.00: Under new law, any cash or noncash charitable donation of $250.00 or more will require written substantiation from the charity. The form of the substantiation is flexible, but the requirement is the responsibility of the donor and must be obtained by the donor prior to filing a tax return — no receipt, no deduction! A canceled check will no longer satisfy this requirement. For noncash contributions worth $250.00 or more, the charity must describe the donated property and indicate whether any goods or services were given in exchange. The charity is not required to place a value on the property it receives. As with quid pro quo donations, separate payments generally will be treated as separate contributions and not aggregated in applying the $250.00 threshold. Any organization knowingly providing a false written statement will be subject to penalties.

CMMS members can be assured that these new tax changes will be observed in 1994 and appropriate substantiation will be provided on a routine basis. Since the responsibility is placed on the taxpayer, however, please advise the Development Office if your documentation is not received when expected. Also remember that there may be significant tax advantages from gifts of appreciated assets (stock, real estate, or a work of art) where the asset’s full and fair market value is recognized for deduction, without tax upon the gain. As with all matters pertaining to income taxes, however, potential donors should consult their tax advisers about their individual tax situation.

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C. Douglass Alves, Jr., Director
Paul L. Berry, Editor
Other contributors to this issue: Patricia Tower, Layne Berge

The Bugeye was the traditional sailing craft of the Bay, and was built in all its glory at Solomons, the “Bugeye Capital of the World.” Membership dues are used to fund special museum projects, programs, and printing of this newsletter. Address comments and membership applications to:
Calvert Marine Museum Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 97
Solomons, MD 20688
(410) 326-2042
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DON’T FORGET THE YEAR-END APPEAL!

CMM’s Year-End Appeal was announced to members early in December, but it remains open through February 11, 1994. So there’s still plenty of time to support the museum with an unrestricted gift. This type of support augments the budgeted funds and makes possible a number of projects and purchases not otherwise funded.

It is hoped that this year’s appeal will reach the $15,000 level of donations from members and friends. Names of those who contributed will be listed in the spring issue of the Bugeye Times.
NEW ROLE FOR THE SKIPJACK MARIE THERESA

Visitors to CMM or passing on Route 2 may have wondered about the boat displayed on the front grounds of the museum. This is the circa 1906 skipjack Marie Theresa, transformed by CMM's boatwright Jack Krolak and volunteers from the Patuxent Small Craft Guild from a floating exhibit to a dry land, hands-on exhibit. Final work on the boat, however, must be deferred until next spring.

Clark Wands of Fishing Creek, Dorchester County, a boatbuilder by trade, built this thirty-foot boat for his daughter Gertrude as a daysailer. Marie Theresa was in many ways a scaled-down version of the larger oyster skips, but she had no deck or cabin.

After Wands sold the vessel, she went through a series of owners who used her mainly for pleasure sailing, but an owner in the 1930s, Walter Banks, added a small air-cooled engine. A later owner, Felix Averill, featured the boat in an article for the October 1953 issue of Chesapeake Skipper, entitled "Skipjackin'," describing the delights of sailing V-bottom, skipjack-rigged small craft. At that time she still retained her undecked appearance, but with wide washboards. The Stoneburner family, who purchased Marie Theresa, added a large cuddy cabin forward.

She was eventually acquired by Dr. Albert Esch of Bethesda who had the boat completely rebuilt along the lines of the skipjack Messenger. These alterations gave Marie Theresa the appearance of a small "oyster pirate dredger," a boat designed for dredging at night on shallow oyster beds reserved for hand tongs. It was in this guise that she was donated to CMM by Dr. Esch in 1978. Since that time she has been a fixture of the waterfront at CMM, kept afloat and in good repair by generous maintenance support from Zahniser's Sailing Center in Solomons.

A review of her status as a floating exhibit was made in 1992, following the museum's acquisition of the 1936 Broomes Island draketail workboat and the 1948 Grover oyster skiff, both large boats and intended for in-water display. These latter boats, more significant historically to Southern Maryland, would require all the museum's limited small craft budget to restore and maintain. As an out-of-water exhibit, moreover, the Marie Theresa would need much less maintenance and would serve as an appropriate visual attraction from the road. On land she would be more accessible as a hands-on, interactive exhibit for children, a role that Gertrude Wands probably would have appreciated.

When the boat was moved this past summertime to Washburn's Boat Yard in Solomons, her side and bottom planking were found to be in good shape, but a large amount of rot was apparent in the deck and cabin and at the base of the mast. The decision was made, therefore, to remove the deck and the cabin added by Dr. Esch and to replace the wide washboards similar to those originally fitted, thus restoring the skipjack closer to her early appearance. Washburn's Boat Yard kindly donated much of the cost of hauling and storing the boat.

On October 25 the Marie Theresa was moved by road to her new location near the southeast door of the Administration Building. Jack Krolak and his volunteers constructed a new cradle, paid for with a generous grant from Patuxent River Appreciation Days, Inc. Remaining PRAD funds will be used in the spring to construct steps to allow access to the inside and to landscape the site. At that time the boat will be rigged and interpretative signage added. CMM will then gain an interesting, educational, and aesthetic addition to its grounds. (Richard J. Dodds)

Marie Theresa at her new location near CMM's Administration Building.
(CMM photo by Richard Dodds)

THE BUGEYE SOCIETY

CMM's new giving club, The Bugeye Society, has twenty-one members to date. This group of $1,000 annual supporters tripled in 1993. Dedicated to continuing the growth and development of the museum and its programs, Bugeye Society members enjoy special benefits befitting their contributions. Entitled to all the benefits of membership, plus an additional 10 percent store discount, Bugeye Society members are honored at a special annual fête and their names will appear on a plaque in the museum lobby.

The following members of The Bugeye Society at the end of 1993 are acknowledged for their generous gifts:
Mr. and Mrs. C. R. Bailey • Ms. Marianne Barrett • Mr. and Mrs. Pat Collins • Calvert Bank • Calvert Marina • First Virginia Bank • Mr. Bedford Clascock & Mrs. Sarah Smith • Mr. John Harms • Mr. Chrisman Tribe • Thomas J. Lipton Foundation • Mr. Denny Murray • Mrs. Marvin Gurstler • Mr. and Mrs. Lee Phillips • Mr. and Mrs. Donald Randall • Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Rowe • Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Stanley • Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative • Mr. George Tighman • Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Woodburn • Woodburn's Food Market • Zahniser's Inc.
Curt Bowman, curator of exhibits (left), and Alan Manuel, CMM cabinetmaker, prepare for fossil seabirds exhibit in Changing Exhibit area.

(CMM photo by Richard Dodds)

Maryland Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein speaking at the rededication of the Solomons School as CMM's Administration Building, September 24.

(CMM photo by Richard Dodds)

Mrs. Jefferson Patterson, Comptroller Louis L. Goldstein (left to right) at the reception for the rededication.

CMM Director D. Douglass Ayers, Jr. (left), confers with volunteers at the Volunteer Council annual meeting, September...
Activities

Meeting of Museum Store Association at CMM. Left to right: Ruth A. Steenburgh, Virginia Marine Science Museum; Christine V. Fedcheck, Museum of American Frontier Culture; Dene Garbow, National Building Museum; Doug Alves, Director of CMM; Dixie Griffin & Dudley Smith, National MSA Office.
(CMM photo by Richard Dodds)

Retirement status on Dorothy and “Buzz” Oursler 22.
(CMM photo by Richard Dodds)

Working beginning on the otter exhibit at the southeast corner of the Exhibit Building, fall 1993.
(CMM photo by Richard Dodds)
House Board received a petition requesting that a sector be added to cover Sandy Point bar off Solomons Island.\footnote{12} “This bar is a very serious and dangerous obstruction to navigation, frequently causing vessels to get ashore.” The petition was signed by no less than the president of the Weems Steamboat Company, Henry Williams, and the captains of a number of steamboats and sailing vessels that regularly traded to the Patuxent River.

The petition brought a quick response from the Light House Board, with both the Fifth District engineer and inspector concurring. On December 18, 1898, the board authorized the installation of a dark sector in the light to cover an arc of eight degrees between 74°30’T and 82°30’T.\footnote{11} It was not until December 10, 1899, however, that the Drum Point light started operating with its new dark sector, achieved by adding a segment of dark glass to the inside of the lantern pane. By keeping out of this dark sector, mariners could avoid the shoal water off Sandy Point.

Further problems arose only a few years later, due apparently to the shifting shoals in this area. In 1911 the district inspector advised the Bureau of Lighthouses that the southerly edge of the dark sector fell short of the buoy marking the south edge of Sandy Point bar by about 110 feet.\footnote{14} Confounding the problem, the dark sector was not very distinguishable against the red light of Drum Point. The inspector recommended not only enlarging the sector to encompass the shoal but also advised that two additional sectors be added to mark the shoals at the northern and southern approaches to the Patuxent River, citing the plans of a Baltimore company to build a railroad to Drum Point with the consequent increase in use of the harbor by larger vessels. Lastly, and most significantly, he recommended that this opportunity be taken to change the light characteristics to a white light with red sectors, which would be less confusing and more visible than a red light with three dark sectors.\footnote{15}

The bureau, acting on those recommendations, ordered Drum Point Lighthouse to become a fixed white light with three red sectors between 204° T and 239° T, 274° T and 10° T, and 75° T and 97° T. The red sectors were created by attaching widths of ruby red glass to the inside of the lantern panes. A mariner could now navigate into the mouth of the Patuxent River by staying within the white sectors, regardless of his approach from the bay. Drum Point Lighthouse’s new beacon took effect on December 1, 1911, and would stay the same until the lighthouse was decommissioned in 1962.

The Logbooks

The museum is fortunate that the logbooks for the Drum Point Lighthouse have survived for the period 1883 to 1943, and are preserved at the National Archives. Typical of most logbooks, entries tend to be brief and not very informative. Keepers were required to make daily entries regarding weather, work performed, and any unusual occurrences. A study of the logbooks reveals an endless round of cleaning, and maintenance, but the logs also recorded strandings and sinkings, the arrival of inspectors and visits by Light House Board steamers, trips to shore for mail, supplies, and for church visits, and the occasional visitors. A few of the unusual events reported were: March 12, 1885, when a sloop dragged anchor and hit the lighthouse, with a crew apparently drunk; one of whom fell overboard and was rescued; August 31, 1886, when trears were noted at 9:50 p.m. and 10:10 p.m., strong enough to slam doors, rattle the bell machine, and wake the children; March 1, 1887, when an extremely low tide allowed the keeper to walk completely around the lighthouse; February 24, 1895, when ice came over from the south side of the river, one floe hitting the station and causing it to shake considerably, overturning several chairs. The trears were caused by the great Charleston, South Carolina, earthquake, the second largest in U.S. history. An interesting story of lighthouse life could be written from the logbooks.

Notes

1. Compilation of Public Documents and Extracts from Reports and Papers Relating to Lighthouses, Light Vessels, and Illuminating Apparatus, and the Beacons, Buoys and Fog Signals, 1789 to 1877, Washington, GPO, 1871. Administration of lighthouses fell under the United States Treasury Department until 1915 when it became part of the Department of Commerce and Labor. The Lighthouse Board was established in 1852, becoming the Bureau of Lighthouses in 1910. The bureau was abolished in 1939 and its functions transferred to the Coast Guard.


3. “Extracts from Annual Reports of the Light House Board, 1865-1901,” Records of the United States Coast Guard, Recent Group 26, National Archives (hereafter RG26).


6. Ibid.


8. Transcript copy in CMNH Library, from original owned by Jennie N. Tompkins.

9. Fifty-Sixth Congres, First Session, 1892, Chapter 433, p.396.


13. Letters Sent to District Inspectors and Engineers 1853-1930,” Box 100.


15. Ibid.

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL EVER BUGEYE BALL!

On October 1, some 220 elegantly attired museum friends danced to the rhythms of Fancy Pants at the Holiday Inn in Solomons. The 1993 Bugeye Ball was a huge success, netting over $10,000 for the Paleontology Hall – $5,000 more than in 1992. The ball committee chose the exhibit “A Window in Time: Maryland in the Miocene” to be the recipient of its earnings, and decked the ballroom out as an undersea scene, with mounted and live fish adorning each table.

More sponsors than ever supported this year’s ball. Attendance was strong and all who attended had a wonderful time. Plans are already underway for the 1994 event, scheduled for September 30, 1994. Put the date on your calendar.

GRANTS

The Development Office announces two grants to CMNH. Baltimore Gas and Electric Company has given an additional $20,000 to the latter, thus increasing their sponsorship of this long-awaited exhibit to $100,000. A new donor is the Washington Gas Light Company, with a three-year pledge of $7,500 to support the exhibit “A Window in Time: Maryland in the Miocene.” Washington Gas stresses education in its corporate giving and has expressed an interest in the future in working with CMNH to aid the educational programs. The support of both of these corporate donors is most gratefully acknowledged.

BOARD CHANGES FOR 1994

The museum’s Board of Governors will see several changes in 1994. Three board members are leaving in December at the end of their terms: Harold J. Kahl, Linda A. McGilvery, and Thomas H. Williams, Jr. All three of these members have made significant contributions to the museum’s governance during their terms of service. To replace these three members, the County Commissioners have appointed Donald L. Brown, J. Matthew Gambrell (returning after a year’s absence from the board), and Sherry D. Reid. Mr. Brown is a retired naval officer and was the 1992/93 president of CMM’s Volunteer Council. Mr. Gambrell owns Calvert Marina and is the developer of The Harbour at Solomons. Mrs. Reid is assistant vice president and office manager of the Solomons office of the Calvert Bank and Trust Company. In addition to these three new members, two members were reappointed: Phillip S. Hughes and Carey O. Randall.

Board members whose service is continuing include the following: Karen H. Abrams, C. R. Bailey, J. Patrick Collins, William B. Glasscock II, Robert Jeffries, Jodie Lee Marinelli, W. Lee Phillips, L. G. Raley, George C. Tighman, and John W. Williams, Jr., County Commissioner Mary M. Krug and CMM director C. Douglass Akes, Jr., are board members ex officio. C. D. Barnes serves as board treasurer. Under current policies, members of the museum board serve also as directors of the Calvert Marine Museum Society, Inc., the nonprofit corporation engaged in raising funds for the museum.
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT —
WALLY ASHYBY, Paleo Volunteer

Wally Ashby was hard at work cleaning and cataloging fish opercular plates in the new paleontology lab as he talked about fossils and his long association with the museum. The working conditions in the lower level of the renovated Administration Building are a big improvement over the old East Annex paleo space where Wally put in his past three years of volunteering.

"Always take a buffer of dirt when you dig a fossil," Wally explained. A plaster jacket holds everything in place until the fossil can be removed from the matrix (usually sand and clay in this area), cleaned, and hardened. Wally demonstrated brushing on a clear solution of hardener and acetone which quickly evaporates and keeps the fossil from crumbling. Finally, each piece is assigned a catalog number and stored in the paleo collection.

Says curator of paleontology, Mike Gottfried: "Wally is the perfect volunteer for helping with CMM's fossil collection — he is very careful and accurate, knows a lot about fossils, and his contributions over the past three years have been invaluable."

Wally Ashby was a federal government employee and retired from the FAA. But he always had more down-to-earth interests, and fossils have held him for the past forty-five years. Along the way, he gradually acquired books, materials, and the expertise to author the popular Fossils of Calvert Cliffs, a CMM booklet scheduled for reprinting that provides an excellent introduction to Miocene animals and local geology. Wally's extensive fossil library has since been donated to the museum.

Wally Ashby is a charter member of the CMM Fossil Club, and for several years his wife Betty Ashby typed The Eocene newsletter. He now serves as Fossil Club treasurer, and feels that working at the museum keeps him in touch with the local fossil scene.

Wally's contributions to the museum extend beyond volunteer service. Many of his significant finds — crocodile scutes, the rare humerus of a giant leatherback turtle, and many shark teeth and dolphin bones, to name a few — are now part of CMM's collections. But every fossil hunter has something that draws him back to the beach and Wally is no exception. Fossilized bones of birds are his specialty. "No," he corrected, "birds are my love."

If you are interested in volunteering at CMM, please call Layne Bergin at (410) 326-2042 to discuss the benefits of being a museum volunteer. (Layne Bergin)

ANOTHER YULETIDE

The yule season began early again in 1993 with the Solomons' Christmas Walk, festivities held on the first weekend in December — somewhat dampened by the Saturday weather. Despite the rain, Santa Claus made three appearances in the museum auditorium welcoming young visitors upon the stage. Patuxent Elementary's second grade choir, dressed in bright red turtlenecks, took their turn on stage to sing carols. A nine-foot Fraser fir tree, trimmed by the museum staff, decorated the lobby for seasonal performances by two groups — Kindred Spirits and the Patuxent Pearls. Another art show, featuring drawings by students of Our Lady Star of the Sea School, was hung in the Discovery Room and attracted much attention. The members' yule party, an annual tradition, was held on December 5 in the Exhibition Building, its success due to those volunteers who decorated, served, and hosted, and to our CMM's members who shared sweet and savory treats. Several hundred members joined the director for the traditional Weems Steamship Line eggnog toast to the season and the coming year.

Festive holiday decorations enveloped the Drum Point Lighthouse during the openings in December, with special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lines and other volunteers for a cedar tree, holly, and assistance with appropriate turn-of-the-century decorations. This year's hard work was captured on video tape by volunteer Paul Grasso.

Thanks to all who helped in the successful celebration of the season.

CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM

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SOLOMONS, MD 20688

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