In Time of Need - the Solomons "Marine Hospital," 1890 - 1930

By Richard J. Dodds, Curator of Maritime History

Few older residents of Solomons can recall the days when Solomons Island boasted a U.S. Public Health Service facility that catered to the medical needs of oyster dredgeboat crews. This "Third Class Relief Station" existed from 1890 to 1930, and was among several hundred relief stations established in small ports where no marine hospitals existed. A Class III station was defined as "under charge of an acting assistant surgeon where there is a contract for the care of sick and disabled seamen."[1]

The origins of the Solomons relief station can be traced back to 1882 when Dr. Walter Wyman, then in charge of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service at Baltimore, and later surgeon-general, witnessed first-hand the hardships suffered by oyster dredgers during the winter months. Surgeon Wyman advocated the establishment of a relief station close to the oyster grounds where there is a contract for the care of sick and disabled seamen.3

The Solomons relief station as it was in 1902. The building may have previously been used as an oyster canning factory, owned by Isaac Solomon, as part of his oyster packing establishment. The station is identified as "hospital" on a plat of 1893, at the corner of Charles and William Streets. Photo donated to CMM by Clarence E. Daw Jr.

Solomons was a good choice for a relief station. In addition to the sheltered anchorage, it was close to the oyster grounds and contained several large stores and artesian wells for resupplying oyster dredgers. Three shipyards were also available for repairs. The proposed hospital ship was an interesting vessel in her own right. The E. A. Stevens was built in 1861 as a semi-submersible ironclad and was originally named Naugatuck, but was renamed in honor of its inventor, Edwin Augustus Stevens. The ironclad was finished in time to join her more famous contemporary Monitor shortly after the epic fight with Merrimac at Hampton Roads on April 30, 1861. After service with the Union Navy, she was employed as a revenue cutter, mainly in North Carolina, until arriving in Baltimore on August 10, 1889.

After inspection by the Marine Hospital Service, the vessel was loaned and quickly outfitted for twenty to thirty patients and provisioned for a stay of three months, in the charge of Assistant Surgeon J. B. Stoner.

The machinery was in poor shape and the Revenue Service agreed to tow her to the Patuxent where she anchored off Solomons on January 28, 1890. All this was accomplished in the remarkably short space of less than a month.

The following day, six "applicants for relief" were seen: two cases of "oyster hands," two cases of grippe (influenza), and one each of pleurisy and the "clap." In a little over two months commission, the hospital ship furnished relief to nearly two hundred seamen.4 The numbers would probably have been greater but an unusually mild winter conspired with a reluctance on the part of some captains to allow crew members to be treated. Stoner reported in a letter to Surgeon-General Hamilton that:

As it is necessary for captains to return to Baltimore and recruit their crew, when shorthanded, and at considerable expense and a loss of about a week's time, many of them purposely anchor at a distance from the floating hospital, prohibit inter-communication between seamen of different vessels, and otherwise debar sick and disabled seamen from reaching the hospital-vessel. From this it would appear that perhaps many suffering seamen needing treatment, but still able to perform their duties, as well as others too sick to work, but kept aboard in hopeful expectation of early recovery, are inhumanely withheld from the benefits offered by the service, solely through the mercenary greed and heartlessness of their employers.5

Continued on page 6
FOSSIL FACTS

CAMELIDS

By Sandy Roberts

The family Camelidae includes the living Old World camels and the llamas of South America. Camelids first appear in the fossil record during the late Eocene, about forty million years ago. Their early evolution and diversification took place in North America. During the Oligocene (a few million years ago), some camelids migrated via a northern land bridge to Eurasia and Africa, where they survive today as the familiar dromedary (one-humped) and Bactrian (two-humped) camels. They also spread to South America during the Pliocene, over a southern land bridge, and today are represented there by the llama, alpaca, guanaco, and vicuna. Camels became extinct in North America by the end of the Pleistocene (the Ice Age).

The Eocene "proto-camel" Protylopus was a rabbit-sized herbivore with four-toed feet and low-crowned teeth. The Oligocene Poebrotherium was a goat-sized, two-toed beast. During the Miocene, coincident with the expansion of grasslands in North America, camelids underwent a major radiation. They increased in variety, size, and shape, with lengthening necks and limbs. Two splayed toes, supported by foot pads, carried the animals at a faster pace than they had been able to walk. The lower incisors inclined forward and a diastema, or space, separated the chewing incisors and the grinding molars. These molars became increasingly hypsodont (high crowned) and their grinding surfaces developed raised crescent-shaped cusps well suited to feeding upon the tough grasses.

Land mammals, such as camels, are unexpected representatives in the marine sediments of the Calvert Cliffs Miocene. Camelid fossils are particularly rare. A partial scapula, belonging perhaps to the giraffe-like camel Aepycamelus, was found at Chancellors Point in the St. Mary's formation. In 1976, a lower left molar of the llama-sized Procylamus was found at the Chesapeake Ranch Club in Lusby. A cast of this tooth is on display at the Calvert Marine Museum.

Camelops, the last North American camelid, survived until near the end of the Pleistocene, disappearing some twelve thousand years ago. Camels have since vanished from the land of their origin, except in zoos, until reintroduced from Asia by the United States Army in the 1850s as beasts of burden for frontier garrisons in the Southwest. The experiment proved infeasible, and the animals were turned loose. The last of these wild camels were seen around 1900.

NEW FACES ON MUSEUM BOARD

There will be several changes on the museum's Board of Governors in 1995, with three of the current members leaving at the end of December: Pat Collins, W. Lee Phillips, and George C. Tilghman. All three made significant contributions to the board, and both Lee Phillips and George Tilghman served as board chairmen. Another board member, Robert Jeffries, resigned during the year. To fill these four vacancies, the County Commissioners have appointed J. Ernest Bell, Michael J. Moore, Carmen N. Sanders, and John C. Smith. Ernie Bell, a resident of St. Mary's County, served twelve years (1983-1994) in the Maryland House of Delegates, with his district representing parts of both St. Mary's and Calvert counties. He is in law practice, and has also served as the vice-president of the St. Mary's County Historical Society. Mike Moore served on the board during 1994 as the ex officio representative of the County Commissioners, and now will serve as a regular board member. Carmen Sanders is best known in Solomons as the owner of Carmen's Gallery, and she has been a museum volunteer, a charter member of the Solomons Business Association, and is on the board of the Friends of Annmarie Garden. John Smith is the Public Affairs Representative of the Baltimore Gas & Electric Company with his office in Prince Frederick. He served on the museum's board from 1984 through 1986, and has been active in many local professional and civic groups. In addition, two present board members were reappointed: Jodie Lee Marinelli and John W. Williams, Jr.

Board members whose service is continuing include: Karen H. Abrams, C. R. Bailey, Jr., Donald L. Brown, J. Matthew Gambrill, William B. Glascock II, Phillip S. Hughes, L. G. Raley, Carey O. Randall, and Sherry D. Reid. CMM's director, C. Douglass Alves, Jr., is an ex officio member of the board, as is a member of the Board of County Commissioners, Dr. Mark Frazer. C. D. Bare serves as board treasurer. Members of the museum's board also serve as directors of the Calvert Marine Museum Society, Inc., the non-profit corporation engaged in raising funds for the museum.

YEAR-END APPEAL UPDATE

The museum's year-end appeal has received $8,200 to date from 123 members. A warm THANK YOU! There's still time to support the museum with an unrestricted gift — support that will augment the budgeted funds to make possible a number of projects and purchases not otherwise funded. Gifts through February 17, 1995, qualify for this appeal. The spring issue of the Bugeye Times will carry the names of contributors.
Muhlenfeld Painting

Calvert Marine Museum was fortunate enough recently to purchase an oil painting by Baltimore artist Otto Muhlenfeld (1871-1907) of the steam tug M. W. Adams. The seventy-three-foot wooden tug was built by M. M. Davis of Solomons in 1903 and was owned by the Arundel Corporation of Baltimore for many years. Muhlenfeld is known as Baltimore's port painter, with tugs being his favorite subject. The museum owns another Muhlenfeld painting, that of the tug Wm. H. Yerkes, Jr., also built at Solomons.

A number of sources contributed to the acquisition of the painting: proceeds from the Iguana's concert in July; an anonymous donation in memory of steamboat historian Harry Jones; a raffle of a model skipjack; the auction of selected non-collection items; a donation from Joe and Jean Phelps; and some internal museum funds.

The museum is currently trying to trace the whereabouts of another Muhlenfeld painting of a Solomons-built tug, the M. Mitchell Davis.

FOSSIL EXHIBIT UPDATE

In the fall issue of the Bugeye Times, there was a report of the receipt by CMM of a grant of $174,000 from the National Science Foundation for our new exhibition "TREASURE FROM THE CLIFFS: Exploring Marine Fossils." Since that exciting news, we have been working on the next phase of developing the exhibit. Visitors over the winter months will be able to see the new fossil preparation laboratory being built — we expect that this will be a popular center of activity in the new exhibit, with volunteers and staff demonstrating how fossils are cleaned and put back together for research or display. At the same time, the giant fossil Great White Shark skeleton is rapidly taking shape in the museum's Woodworking Shop. Plan to stop by and see this unique project unfold!

In order to make room for the current construction, two of our most popular fossil displays have been moved. The model of the giant bird Pelagornis is now hanging in the Discovery Room, and the giant shark jaws have been moved to the Woodworking Shop so they can be "fitted" to the rest of the skeleton.

"Team Paleo," along with everyone else at CMM, would like to thank all of the generous contributors to our "Get a Piece of the Shark" campaign, which to date has raised almost $6,000 for the exhibit. As always, it is strong support from the community and our members that makes it possible for CMM to grow and better serve our visitors. (Mike Gottfried)
This year’s seventeenth annual Patuxent River Appreciation Days (PRAD), October 8 and 9, were very successful, due in part to the beauty of the World War II anniversary. To the usual activities and events — crafts, regional food, a parade, boat rides, and scientific and environmental presentations of the fiftieth anniversary of World War II, particularly this area’s contributions to the war effort. Especially significant was the participation of the Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, along with many retired military personnel. Special events included a Commemorative Flyby and a 1940s dance, both at CMM are pictured below.

A color guard from the Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, participated in the opening ceremony on October 8.

Photo by Layne Bergin

Various educational displays were scattered around the boat basin.

The museum’s Volunteer Council sought museum members and volunteers, sold brownies, and offered raffle tickets at a table near CMM’s entrance. Ruth Showalter, left, was one of several volunteers to staff the table.

Photo by Layne Bergin

Visitors — young and old — learned from the Calvert Marine Museum in a 1940s setting.

Photo by Layne Bergin
Winter 1994/95

The holidays were jollier than ever as the museum decked the halls for the annual Solomons Christmas Walk and the CMMS Yule Party, December 9 to 11. Santa greeted young visitors in the Changing Exhibits area surrounded by the artwork of local children. Five decorated trees were up, including the lobby’s nine-foot Fraser fir topped with a gilded horseshoe crab “star.” Throughout the weekend, entertainment was provided by the Patuxent Pearls, Kindred Spirits, and a high school choir in medieval dress. Evening visitors were led to the museum doors by rows of luminaria, and the festive Marie Theresa was outlined in lights.

On Sunday, Yule Party-goers enjoyed wagon rides, shopping, storytelling, and candlelit tours of the Drum Point Lighthouse. Congratulations to John and Laurie Ford of Lusby, winners of the door prize of a beautiful Christmas coverlet. The decorating session in the lighthouse made the front page of the Calvert Independent newspaper on December 7 in full color. Thanks to Phil and Josie Lines and other spirited volunteers and staff for assistance with all the seasonal fun. And — if you missed the eggnog toast by CMM Director Doug Alves — a happy and healthy 1995 to our members, friends, and families!
On a lighter note, Stoner, in an undated letter to Dr. Wyman, commented that “the country surrounding is beautiful and the salt air bracing.”

After the close of the oyster dredging season on March 31, the Stevens was towed to Baltimore, and sold to a private owner on April 24, 1890. The experiment was deemed a success, however, and it was decided to set up a permanent relief station at Solomons Island. In October, Surgeon W. H. Hutton of the Marine Hospital Service at Baltimore was detailed to find temporary housing for a relief station at Solomons and to enquire into an acting assistant surgeon for the oyster season. The Marine Hospital Service had to lease a building to provide office space and a treatment facility for the relief station. This arrangement has led to confusion over the site of the “marine hospital” over the years, and records indicate at least four locations on Solomons Island in the forty years of the station’s existence.

The first site was an 18’ by 24’ room alongside a restaurant owned by a Mr. Carey (possibly Merrill H. Carey) and leased for $100 for five months. This situation lasted only a year, and in 1891 a building was leased from Thomas J. Caster, an oyster planter. The location of this building is unknown. Records show that by 1893 the Marine Hospital Service was leasing a building from M. Mitchell Davis for use as a hospital. The structure appears on an 1893 plat, labeled “hospital,” at the corner of Charles and William Streets. This arrangement continued until at least 1898 and possibly longer.

Unfortunately, much of the old correspondence between the Solomons relief station and the Surgeon-General’s Office does not exist any longer. It is unclear, therefore, when the facility was moved from this site to its next location. By 1924, however, the station had settled into its last site, at “3 Davis Street.” Three rooms on the first floor of this building were rented at $12 a month from the Estate of M. M. Davis (administered by his son, Clarence E. Davis). The first room housed the office quarters, equipment, and medical and surgical supplies. The second room was the emergency hospital of eight beds, and the third was for storage of fuel, etc. The property was leased until the relief station closed in 1930. This building is now a private residence.

The Marine Hospital Service had considerably better luck in securing a doctor for the facility. Surgeon Hutton recommended Dr. William H. Marsh, a private practitioner in Solomons since 1878 as acting assistant surgeon of the Solomons Island Relief Station. The appointment was approved by Surgeon-General Hamilton for a period of five months from November 1, 1890, at $50 a month. For the next forty years, Dr. Marsh’s name would be inextricably linked with public health at Solomons.

Marsh’s appointment as acting assistant surgeon was made permanent on March 31, 1891, with a salary of $300 per year. This doctor appealed to the Marine Hospital Service, citing the large number of seamen treated, the late hours and Sunday work required to accommodate free time of crew members, and the accompanying clerical work which forced him to give up part of his private practice.

Dr. Marsh’s report to the Surgeon-General for fiscal year 1893 gives some indication of the types of cases handled. The largest number of medical cases were acute bronchitis—191. Interestingly, as Marsh noted, cases of pneumonia were comparatively few, despite the fact that crews were often poorly fed and clothed. Seriously ill patients were sent to Baltimore for treatment on the twice-weekly steamboat. Hours were very seasonal, with the busiest time being during the oyster dredging season in winter.

Oyster dredging was dangerous work and accidents were common. The Baltimore Sun on December 22, 1891, reported the death of John Koch, a hand aboard the schooner Win. Summers, at the Solomons hospital. He was badly injured when hit in the head by a crank from one of the dredge winders. During severe freezes, hundreds of weary crewmen could be found trudging north along snow- and ice-covered roads heading to Annapolis or Baltimore. Many were put ashore from their ice-bound boats with no money, forced to rely on the charity of local inhabitants.

As acting assistant surgeon, Dr. Marsh had to contend with his fair share of bureaucratic forms and reports. The station was regularly inspected, and the U.S. Public Health Service was not slow to point out any discrepancy. In one of the few inspection reports to survive, the following comments were offered in 1925:

The situation appeared to be much the same in 1927 when the office was described as “cluttered up with a lot of unserviceable books, papers and magazines.”

Some years earlier, in 1896, Dr. Marsh was reprimanded for absenting himself from the station without leave, resulting in a doctor having to be called in from six miles away to attend a seriously ill seaman. More serious, however, was a charge of criminal neglect made by a coroner’s jury in Crisfield in 1904 against Dr. Marsh. A crewman aboard the pungy schooner Harriett Howser complained of being ill and asked for medical treatment. He was taken to Solomons but not received at the hospital. A few days later he died aboard the boat. The jury censured Marsh’s conduct “in not giving medical attention to deceased when applied to, on the ground that it was after office hours, and that the deceased had not been aboard the boat 30 days.”

Little evidently came of this case, as Dr. Marsh continued as acting assistant surgeon for many years after and enjoyed widespread respect. Marsh eventually retired from private practice but continued his association with public health. He was appointed senior surgeon in the USPHS Reserve in 1939 and was a life member of the Military Surgeons Association. He was also well known in Calvert County as a weather recorder for the Baltimore office of the U.S. Weather
The Marine Hospital Service was established in 1798 for the relief of sick and disabled seamen, under the auspices of the Treasury Department. A locally collected and administered Marine Hospital Fund deducted money from the wages of all American sailors to pay for the system. Hospitals sprang up in the larger seaport cities and gradually spread west.

In 1871 there was a major reorganization, and hospitals were removed from local control and placed under national coordination within the Treasury Department, with a centralized administration headed by a supervising surgeon-general (later retitled surgeon-general). In 1889 a Commissioned Corps was established and all medical officers of the Marine Hospital Service would thereafter be appointed by the president after passing a “satisfactory” examination. By this time the service had assumed quarantine duties and a program of disease research.

In 1902 the name was changed to the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service, and in 1912 to the Public Health Service. The system reached its peak in 1943 when it operated thirty hospitals, but in 1981 the remaining hospitals were closed after Congress removed the entitlement to medical care for American seamen.

ENDNOTES

4. W. H. Hutton, U.S. Marine Hospital Service, Baltimore, to W. Wyman, January 31, 1890; Box 54, Correspondence with the Treasury Department, ca. 1870-1910; RG90.
7. J. B. Stoner to W. Wyman, undated; Box 151, Letters Received from Marine Hospitals; RC90.
10. J. B. Hamilton to W. H. Marsh, October 23, 1890; Letter Book 79, Letters Sent; RG90. The Calvert Gazette, November 1, 1890, states that it was a large house rented from W. T. Carey, a restaurant proprietor.
13. Lease agreement, May 5, 1924; Box 333, General Subject File 1924-1935, Closed Stations: Maryland, Baltimore Public Health District #2 to Solomons Island [hereafter, General Subject File]; RG90. Longtime Solomons resident James “Pepper” Langely believes the USPHS was occupying this building as early as 1915.
15. W. H. Marsh to W. Wyman, Surgeon-General’s Office, June 18, 1892; Box 54, Correspondence with the Treasury Department, ca. 1870-1910; RG90.
17. Inspection Report, July 28, 1925; Box 333, General Subject File; RC90.
18. Inspection Report, September 22, 1927; Box 333, General Subject File; RC90.
21. W. H. Marsh to the Surgeon-General, July 7, 1930; Box 333, General Subject File; RC90.
22. W. H. Marsh to the Surgeon-General, May 16, 1930; Box 333, General Subject File; RC90.
23. In 1893, the Treasury Department surveyed Hog Island, located in St. Mary’s County at the southern end of the Patuxent River, for possible use as a quarantine station, and $7,000 was appropriated for purchase of a site. Plans fell through when P. M. Tuck, owner of Hog Island, refused to sell. Calvert Gazette, March 25 and May 20, 1893.
Volunteer Spotlight -

Electa Phillips  Development/Bugeye Ball

The museum’s single biggest fundraiser is the black-tie dinner dance, the Bugeye Ball. This glamorous event dates from 1990 when it crowned the celebration held in honor of CMM’s twentieth anniversary. Museum supporters have had the opportunity each September since to put on the ritz for a good cause. The past two balls have netted over $24,000, benefiting the new paleontology exhibit, “Treasure from the Cliffs.” The 1993 and 1994 Bugeye Ball committees have been chaired by Electa Phillips.

“I think it’s a good public relations vehicle,” said Electa recently in describing the ball. She served on the Bugeye Ball committee in 1991 and 1992 and saw a need to expand the event beyond the membership rolls. Tickets for the evening gala are priced to be accessible to a wide audience with only a modest $15 increase in five years. But that makes community support the most important component of the event plan.

From lists prepared each January, sponsorship letters go out in March of the year offering support categories of $100, $250, and $500. Then the ball theme, dance band, and color scheme must be chosen. These dictate table arrangements and designs of the invitations and programs that are submitted to the printer in July. Invitations are sent in August, the menu is planned, tested, and approved, and on the day of the event, every committee member takes part. While each Bugeye Ball planner has had a project during the year, everyone works as a team during the final countdown to lights, tables, food, music ... action!

Current Bugeye Ball committee members are: Cindy Arban, Jean Murray, Carey Randall, Sherry Reid, Carmen Sanders, and Eve Washburn. There are already plans for Bugeye Ball 1995, the twenty-fifth anniversary year of Calvert Marine Museum. Promises Electa, “We’ll definitely have a special celebration.” Under consideration are several changes, but lots of silvery shimmer. The working date is September 25, 1995.

Electa and husband, Lee, first came to Calvert County in 1963 and built a second home in 1985. The couple, who have three daughters and two grandchildren, now live here virtually full time. They are well-acquainted with the museum. Lee Phillips has just completed a three-year term on the museum’s Board of Governors, and is the immediate past chairman. But Electa also contributes volunteer service in her Arlington, Virginia, community as a member of the Dominion Guild. The guild’s annual fundraiser, a Christmas house tour with artisans from around the country, benefits a different charity each year.

“I’ve volunteered always,” shares Electa, with an appreciation of her freedom to be a full-time volunteer. As double-income families become the norm, she understands it’s difficult for many to have the opportunity for volunteer service. “It’s a luxury today,” she says.

“People don’t realize the amount of planning work that goes into an event such as the ball,” says museum director Doug Alves. “Volunteers have been the backbone of the museum from its founding, and it is the dedication of friends like Electa and Lee that have helped make this organization such a success.” (Layne Bergin)

Help Wanted: Touch Tank Volunteers

It’s a wet job, but someone’s got to do it. Why not volunteer to interpret local aquatic life at the estuarium’s touch tank? Training will be provided until you are confident to go it alone. Then amaze visitors with facts about horseshoe crabs, terrapins, and the whole variety of ecological systems right outside the museum’s doors. Just a four-hour shift each month reserves your place on the estuarine biology team, but membership in the Volunteer Council is a requisite in this public-service job. Call Layne Bergin, volunteer coordinator, for details: (410) 326-2042.