COVE POINT LIGHTHOUSE: SENTINEL ON CALVERT'S CLIFFS
By Richard J. Dodds, Curator of Maritime History

Cove Point Light

This is a stationary light on Cove Point, and elevated 40 feet above the tide. It is intended to lead vessels clear of the long low point on which it stands, close to which are 7 fathoms water. It also serves to guide vessels clear of Cedar Point, and such as are bound into the Patuxent River.

Introduction

With the approach of 1998, marking 170 years in the history of Cove Point Lighthouse, and with the efforts currently under way to transfer the property from the U. S. Coast Guard to Calvert County government, this may be an appropriate moment to look back at the long and varied history of Cove Point Light Station, Maryland's oldest continuously operating light station. Built in 1828, Cove Point is the fifth oldest extant lighthouse on Chesapeake Bay after Old Cape Henry (1791), Old Point Comfort (1802), New Point Comfort (1804), Pooles Island (1825), and Concord Point (1827). It is located four miles north of the Patuxent River on a prominent sandy spit of land projecting into the Chesapeake.

The United States government purchased two parcels of land from Dorcas Gray Bourne on June 12, 1828, for $300.00—one of two acres and seventy-two square perches, which became the site of the lighthouse proper, and the other of two acres intended for a garden plot. (This latter property was sold in 1926.) Dorcas Bourne had inherited part of what was once Eltonhead Manor, originally surveyed in 1652 for Edward Eltonhead and containing five thousand acres. Prior to purchasing the property at Cove Point, the U. S. Congress appropriated $6,000.00 in 1825 to build a lighthouse at Cedar Point, south of the Patuxent River, but the Lighthouse Board later changed its mind and decided that a light at Cove Point would be better. A new appropriation was made in 1828 for $5,685.00.

The contract for construction was awarded to John Donaho of Havre de Grace, a prolific lighthouse builder who built twelve of the first seventeen lighthouses in Maryland, including Bodkin Island Lighthouse (1822), the first lighthouse in operation in Maryland. The government's representative was William B. Barney, District Naval Officer and Superintendent of Lighthouses and the son of naval hero Commodore Joshua Barney. Specifications called for a light tower, forty feet in height, to be built of either whitewashed brick or stone—brick was chosen, making this among the first brick lighthouse towers built in the United States. The one-and-a-half story dwelling house would also be of brick, twenty feet by thirty-four feet, containing two rooms on the first floor with an entry between. Specifications also required an attached kitchen wing fourteen by twelve feet, a privy, and a well or cistern (a cistern was in fact used for many years, fed by rainwater runoff from the roof of the house and kitchen).

A separate contract was signed in 1828 with James Geddes of Baltimore to furnish the lighting apparatus for $550.00. This consisted of thirteen (Continued on Page 6)
ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL BUGEYE BALL

On September 13, the Calvert Marine Museum hosted the 1997 Bugeye Ball for the benefit of the Lighthouse Preservation Endowment Fund. More than 230 guests enjoyed an evening with beautiful weather. The decorative theme featured lighthouse collectible centerpieces in candlelight as well as the Cedar Point Lighthouse exhibit on display in the lower gallery.

Highlights of the ball were dancing with music by Main Street, a silent auction, raffle, and a gourmet dinner that ended with a scrupwile lighthouse dessert, prepared especially for the ball by Maryland Country Caterers. The lucky winner of the 1997 ball ticket raffle was James Perry Lamar of St. Mary’s County.

The 1997 Bugeye Ball committee members were Cindy Araban, Jeane Bare, Nancy Bennett, Joan Kocen, Jean Murray, Sherry Reid, Peggy Shook, Dreena Yacovelle, and chairman Carey Randall.

Supporters of this year’s ball were: Benefactors — Stanley and Barbara Benning, Cumberland and Ery LLC, and G. S. Oursler Jr.; Sponsors — Ernie and Ann Bell, BGE, Calvert Bank and Trust, Dr. Mark Frazer, Mr. and Mrs. John E. Harms, Mr. and Mrs. Phillip S. Hughes, Marrick Properties Inc., Don and Carey Randall, SMECO, Don and SarahBeth Smith, Washburn’s Boat Yard Inc., Louise Woemer and Don Kollmorgen; Patrons — Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Aldridge Sr., Mr. and Mrs. C. D. Bare, Calvert Marina, Heritage Chrysler Plymouth Jeep Eagle, Holiday Inn Select Solomons, The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Mr. and Mrs. Walter M. Meinhardt, The Honorable and Mrs. Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr., Ralph’s Dodge of Prince Frederick, Scheibel Construction, Solomons Veterinary Clinic, and Mrs. Isabelle Woodburn.

MUSEUM BOARD IN 1998

The County Commissioners have appointed three new members to the museum’s Board of Governors for 1998. Former State Senator C. Bernard Fowler, Solomons businesswoman Susan Fischer, and St. Mary’s County resident Dawn Szot will replace outgoing board members J. Ernest Bell, Jodie Marinelli, and John W. Williams Jr. who have all served with distinction during the past years. Two present board members were reappointed: Michael J. Moore and Carmen N. Sanders.

Board members continuing to serve include: Karen H. Abrams, Donald L. Brown, J. Matthew Gambrill, William B. GlascocK II, Carl M. Loffler, Sherry D. Reid, Margaret W. Reynolds, John A. Simpson Jr., John C. Smith, and George C. Tilghman. County Commissioner Dr. Mark R. Frazer is an ex-officio member as is CMM’s director C. Douglass Alves Jr. Members of the museum’s Board of Governors also serve as directors of the Calvert Marine Museum Society, Inc., the non-profit corporation that raises funds for the museum.

VIRGINIA N. ALLMAN, who for over the past thirteen years has handled the museum’s financial affairs as business manager, will retire on January 30, 1998. Ginny was appointed in November 1984 as administrative assistant after an earlier career at the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory. Her responsibilities have involved the changing and growing financial records of the museum — both county and internal budgets — as well as those of the Calvert Marine Museum Society, the separate 501(c)(3) fundraising arm of CMM. Her detailed and accurate records have assisted the museum’s Board of Governors and the society’s Board of Directors in carrying out their fiduciary responsibilities. In addition to her financial work, Ginny has supervised the office staff and the work of the museum store.

Board members, staff members, and museum volunteers have all benefited from Ginny’s dedicated services and her willingness to provide assistance with any questions involving budgets and finances — a somewhat thankless, but vital museum function. Ginny and her husband James J. Allman, the county’s director of administration and finance, live in the Huntingtown area where they plan to remain.
Of Special Interest to Members . . .

The 1997 Year-End Appeal
Your Gift Supports Estuarine Ecology Internships

CMM staff have greatly enjoyed working side by side with students to stimulate their interest in museum work and help them prepare for careers as museum and science professionals. We have been fortunate to have talented young women and men from St. Mary's College and the University of Maryland take the initiative to pursue internships with us.

Internships are extremely valuable both to students and to the museum. Our interns acquire important skills while contributing much-appreciated energy, enthusiasm, and creativity to museum projects. CMM looks forward to continuing our partnership this summer through our Estuarine Ecology Internship program.

You may recall, from previous Bugeye Times articles, just what intricate work is involved in "keeping the critters" (see Winter 1996/97), from the most careful field collection and quarantine to complex chemical and mechanical life-support maintenance. Estuarine ecology interns gain valuable experience in all facets of public aquarium husbandry — skills that give them a bona fide edge as they pursue careers in the competitive science world.

If you agree that providing young people with opportunities to gain real work experience is important, please consider making a gift to the Year-End Appeal. Your gift will directly support estuarine ecology internships and other very important museum projects and outreach in estuarine biology, maritime history, and paleontology.

Please remember that although a new year has dawned, the 1997 Year-End Appeal is still very much under way. If you weren't able to send a gift by the end of calendar year 1997, feel free to send one now. It's never too late.

All gifts to the Calvert Marine Museum Society are 100% tax-deductible. Contributors (through February) to the 1997 Year-End Appeal will be noted in the spring 1998 Bugeye Times.

Since I was seven or eight years old I've wanted to "swim with the dolphins."
But, after spending summer after summer at my grandmother's house on the Chesapeake Bay, I decided that creating a jellyfish repellent was a much more important goal! In 1992 I enrolled in the University of Maryland's Marine Biology Program. During college breaks I worked at Calvert Marine Museum, learning how to culture food for the fish, maintaining life-support systems (which included everything from general maintenance to cleaning and plumbing), learning the techniques of proper feeding, collecting new specimens, and, most importantly, researching some very complex problems!

I am most thankful to have had the chance to breed seahorses and rear their young. So much information was obtained during that project that would come to help the estuarium with future seahorse exhibits — not the least of which were the young that survived to later become a main feature on exhibit in our gallery.

I am grateful to have worked at the Calvert Marine Museum. Hands-on experience is just what I needed to see that being an aquarist is more than just feeding the fish and playing with turtles — it's physically demanding and intellectually stimulating, as there is always something new to learn.

I have now graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Marine Biology and look forward to starting a career in the field. Working with the animals at CMM has given me a great résumé. Working with the people has given me friends for life and experiences I will never forget.

- Carin Stringer
CMM Estuarine Ecology Intern, 1996-97

To Make Your Gift to the 1997 Year-End Appeal . . .

Send your check to Calvert Marine Museum Society, P.O. Box 97, Solomons, MD 20688. If you wish to make your gift by credit card, call Sybol Cook at 410-326-2042, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
THE CHESAPEAKE FLOTILLA: 
AN UPDATE

In the recent summer issue of the Bugeye Times, Donald G. Shomette reported the plans for this past summer to carry out an extensive underwater exploration in St. Leonard Creek and the upper tidal Patuxent River for remains of the Chesapeake Flotilla scuttled by Commodore Joshua Barney in August 1814. Don is in the process of preparing his final report on this project, but he has provided preliminary information about the accomplishments of the summer's work at both locations. Although the results were less conclusive than expected, they did prove useful and will provide a basis for further work in 1998. There are plans under way for the project in 1998, although Mr. Shomette will not direct the work. Since the Calvert Marine Museum is one of the sponsors of the work, our members will be kept informed of any developments in this most historically significant project. (Paul Berry)

Paul Avery and Chris Southerly display a compass timber from a site in upper St. Leonard Creek in July 1997. The timber was replaced where found.

Photo by Donald G. Shomette

Feeling Crabby This Winter?

Become a Calvert Marine Museum Touch Tank Volunteer and show our visitors wonders such as terrapins, horseshoe crabs, and other marine life that inhabit the area.

Loose that shell-shocked pace and become a Paleo Prep Lab Volunteer and learn how to demonstrate fossil preservation.

Both positions deal directly with the public. We offer flexible hours and training. If this interests you, call Leslie Scher Brown at 410/326-2042.

CMM honored recently the family and friends of the late Melvin Owen Grover for their support with the restoration and exhibit of the 1948 oyster skiff formerly owned by Owen Grover. Donated to the museum in 1990, the skiff was restored by volunteers of the Patuxent Small Craft Guild. In the photo, CMM board chairman Jack Williams is shown presenting a certificate of appreciation to (from the left) Dale Dixon, Scott Leins, Rebecca Grover, Orville Garner, Eva Squires, Ellen Garner, Ruth Dixon, Alvin Grover, Ryan Grover, Oliver Foote, and Melvin Grover.

Photo by Bob Hall

At Patuxent River Appreciation Days (PRAD) on October 11 and 12, CMM volunteer John Johnson demonstrated ropework techniques, here shown with a young visitor.

Photo by Bob Hall
Emphasis at PRAD on environmental programs is shown in one of the exhibit areas.

Photo by Bob Hall

When local business owner Carmen Nance Sanders bought the old M. M. Davis house in Solomons in 1996 for her Carmen’s Gallery, she discovered in the attic early business records of shipyard owner Marcellus M. Davis. These papers were recently donated to CMM where they were reunited with similar papers found in the same attic by Arnold Humphreys some twenty years ago. The resulting archive forms the largest surviving record of one of the county’s most important industries. In front of Carmen’s Gallery are (from the left) C. Douglass Alves Jr., CMM director; Carmen Sanders; Paul Berry, museum librarian; Arnold Humphreys; and Richard Dodds, CMM curator of maritime history.

Photo by Bob Hall

CMM’s volunteers in the Patuxent Small Craft Guild have been working for several years on the restoration of the thirty-six-foot Alpheus Sewell draketail workboat, built in 1936 and acquired by CMM in 1989. Mr. Sewell of Broomes Island built the boat for his son, Clarence, for crabbing, oystering, eeling, and fishing. The restoration effort reached a milestone in October when the hull was turned over with considerable effort from staff and volunteers.

Photo by Richard Dodds
patent lamps backed by the same number of sixteen-inch parabolic reflectors. The lamps were a modification of a smokeless lamp developed by the French scientist Aime Argand in 1782. This catoptric system of lamps and reflectors, as it was known, was mounted on a framework inside the lantern. Light rays from the lamps struck the surface of the parabolic reflectors and were then directed out to the mariner in a horizontal cone. A steady white light was achieved which, in the case of Cove Point, could be seen for fifteen miles. This system was replaced by a more efficient Fresnel lens in 1855. There was no fog signal until 1837.

The lighthouse entered service in December 1828. From among eleven applicants, James Somerville was appointed the first keeper with an annual salary of $350.00. There would be a total of twenty civilian keepers until the last, James T. Somers, retired in 1958 (see sidebar). Thereafter, until the lighthouse was automated in 1986, the station would be manned exclusively by Coast Guard personnel.

In 1971 the lamp was converted to a 120-volt, 500-watt tungsten halogen type with a twenty-one mile nominal range, and in 1985 a 250mm emergency light, made of acrylic plastic, was added to the top of the tower. Prior to automation in 1986, an automatic lamp changer was installed in the primary light that permitted a new lamp to rotate into position in the event that the existing lamp burned out. Today, Cove Point still flashes out its welcome warning every ten seconds, although it is now monitored by computer from Coast Guard Activities in Baltimore.

### Aids to Navigation, Part II: The Fog Signal

Funds for a fog signal at Cove Point were not appropriated until 1837, but the precise nature of its installation is not known. By 1858, however, the fog bell and striking mechanism were replaced by a new set, mounted in a wooden framework. A weight-driven clockwork mechanism had to be wound at regular intervals for the bell striker to operate. The life span of these towers was remarkably short, as they had to be replaced in 1868, 1881, and 1887. In 1892 the tower was moved back sixteen feet from the water due to land erosion, and in 1898 it was replaced again, this time by a square, pyramidal skeletal structure of iron. Only a few years later, in 1901, the iron tower was removed and a wooden building, twelve by sixteen feet, was erected on the same site. Its purpose was to house a four-horsepower Mietz & Weiss oil engine that drove an Ingersoll & Sargeant air compressor which, in turn, was connected to a second-class Daboll trumpet projecting about 90 feet from the building.

### Aids to Navigation, Part II: The Fog Signal

In 1855 a fifth-order Fresnel lens replaced the reflector system. First developed in 1819 by a young French engineer Augustin Fresnel, a Fresnel lens consisted of a number of prisms designed to reflect the light from the lamp into a horizontal beam. At Cove Point a clockwork mechanism was added to rotate the lens, producing a light described as “fixed varied by flashes,” or FVF (fixed 60 seconds, eclipse 12.8 seconds, flash 4.4 seconds, and eclipse 12.8 seconds, for a total of 90 seconds). In 1857 a larger fourth-order lens was installed.

In 1912 the light’s characteristic was changed to an occulting white light every thirty seconds (light for 21 seconds, eclipse for 9 seconds), the lens itself making one revolution every sixty seconds. Two years later, in 1914, the lamp was changed from oil wick to incandescent oil vapor (IOV), where kerosene was mixed with air under pressure, creating a fine volatile mist that soaked a mantle and produced a brilliant, steady white light.

A revolutionary change came in 1928 when the light was electrified, with a 115-volt, 150-watt bulb replacing the kerosene lamp. The opportunity was also taken to replace the existing fourth order lens with the current lens, consisting of six panels, and made by Barbier and Berard of France in 1897. The light’s characteristic was also changed to a flashing white light every ten seconds (flash 0.9 seconds, eclipse 9.1 seconds). With the change in the lighting apparatus, candle power increased from 2,900 to 35,000. Interestingly, the rotating mechanism for the lens was not electrified at the same time. The clockwork mechanism located directly beneath the lens was connected by wire rope to thirty pounds of weight that hung suspended inside a wooden shaft. This had to be wound every seven hours. When the current electric motor was installed is unknown, but the clockwork mechanism and wooden shaft have been retained in place.

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The keeper's dwelling as it appeared in 1880, a far cry from the large duplex structure that exists today. Courtesy, U.S. National Archives.

By 1906 a third-class Daboll trumpet replaced the earlier apparatus, providing an eight-second blast at seven-second intervals. Change came again in 1928 when an electric nautophone mounted on top of the light tower replaced the compressed-air fog signal (engine and generator were located in the 1901 building), providing a three-second blast every seven seconds. This was changed again in 1935 when an air-powered diaphone replaced the nautophone, giving a three-second blast every fifteen seconds. In 1938 this consisted of a type C Daboll diaphone trumpet connected to two compressor units driven by two Chrysler twenty-two horsepower gasoline engines. About 1950 the fog-signaling apparatus was moved to a new fourteen-by-twenty-two-foot brick building that also housed the radio beacon equipment (see next section). In 1969 the fog signal was again converted from air to electric, and it currently sounds a two-second blast every fifteen seconds, prompted by an automatic fog detector that activates the foghorn when visibility drops below three miles.

Radio beacons are an electronic aid to navigation that were introduced in the United States in 1921. A station equipped with a radio beacon sends a distinctive signal made up of dots and dashes. Aboard a vessel, a navigator using a radio direction finder (RDF) could identify the station and determine a bearing on a chart, thereby establishing his position somewhere along that line. By plotting another line of position (from another radio beacon station), the vessel's position could be found at the point of intersection.

The radio beacon at Cove Point was established on June 30, 1928, transmitting a group of one dot and one dash for sixty seconds and then repeated every two minutes on a frequency of 306 kilocycles. The signal was transmitted continuously in periods of fog or low visibility, but in clear weather was transmitted from 5:00 to 5:30 and 11:00 to 11:30 a.m. and from 5:00 to 5:30 and 11:00 to 11:30 p.m. The timing, frequency, and signal were changed several times over the next fifty years, the last signal characteristic being CP (---) broadcasting on 314 kilohertz. Cove Point was also considered a distance-finding station: in a further refinement, the radio beacon and sound signal were synchronized so that a navigator could also find his distance from the station using just one line of position. This was accomplished by observing the time elapsed between receiving the radio beacon signal and hearing the corresponding synchronized signal sound. The time in seconds divided by 5.5 would give the corresponding distance in nautical miles. This distance-finding function ceased about 1962, and the radio beacon itself was disestablished on December 31, 1984, as other more effective electronic navigational systems have come into force.

Cove Point as a Vessel-Reporting Station

In the early years of the twentieth century, there were three vessel-reporting stations on the Chesapeake Bay: Cape Henry in Virginia and Cove Point and North Point in Maryland. In 1899 the Baltimore Chamber of Commerce successfully petitioned the U. S. Lighthouse Board for permission to place a telephone at Cove Point Light Station for the primary reason of giving warning of the impending arrival of merchant vessels at Baltimore. Cove Point was selected as it was about halfway between Cape Henry, at the mouth of the bay, and Baltimore. Keepers were required in daytime to note the names of inbound and outbound vessels and to notify the Baltimore Maritime Exchange of this shipping intelligence. (They were also asked to report local weather observations.) In order to facilitate this, the station was supplied with a large spyglass mounted on a tripod — often seen on the porch of the keeper’s house in photographs taken at Cove Point.

A large skeletal tower, which also appears in many photographs, was erected in connection with the Maritime Exchange. Its original intention was to be able to communicate by flag hoist with passing ships and also to carry storm warnings, but it was evidently little used for these functions in later years. Although the tower appears in photographs as late as 1990, all that now remains of the tower are the four concrete footings for the legs. With the widespread use of ship-to-shore radio, the need for vessel-reporting stations declined, and by 1953 Cove Point was no longer listed as such in the annual List of Lights.

The Changing Landscape

From 1828 until 1883 the station remained virtually as it was built. The keeper’s dwelling was of a standard pattern — one and a half stories — with a parlor and bedroom separated by a hall, and a further two small bedrooms above. A cellar and attached kitchen completed the layout. In 1883 the roof was removed, the walls raised, and a new roof of tin completed. The house now became two full stories. Fifteen years later, in 1898, a full-length
front porch was added with a smaller one in the back. A fourteen-by-sixteen-foot summer kitchen was also added in the back, but separate from the main building. New brick walks were laid among the house, tower, and fog bell tower. The latter tower had been replaced several times, as detailed earlier, but in 1901 was replaced by a twelve-by-sixteen-foot fog signal house which is still there today.

The major change came in 1925 when the keeper’s dwelling was rebuilt to two-and-one-half stories, with the addition of a large dormer structure. As a result, the bottom portion of the house now consists of the original brick while the rest is wood-frame construction. The windows either side of the original front door were converted to doors, thus making the house a duplex. By tradition, the keeper’s family always stayed on the side nearest the tower. By 1927 there was also an artesian well in addition to the eight-hundred-gallon cistern.

It was not until 1932 that indoor plumbing arrived with a bathroom built on each side, and an attendant septic system installed. Quarters “A” and “B” now had six rooms: living room and kitchen/dining room on the first floor, two bedrooms and a bath on the second, and another bedroom on the third floor. Exactly where the assistant keeper stayed until the duplex was created is unknown (the first assistant keeper was appointed in 1864). A new kitchen was added later to the back of each of the quarters.

Sometime in the early years of the twentieth century a garage was built to the west of the main house which may in turn have replaced a carriage house and stable. In 1932 the garage was replaced by a newer version. This building would later be used as enlisted quarters during the years of World War II and thereafter when a third keeper, a Coast Guard serviceman, was added to the station’s staff. Around 1950 new enlisted quarters (Quarters “C”), in the shape of a single-story frame cottage, was built near the entrance to the station. About the same time the existing brick fog-signal/radio beacon/generator building was constructed, and all machinery moved out of the earlier 1901 wooden structure. The light tower itself has changed little, but was covered with "shocretce" in 1953.

As the man-made landscape has changed over time, so too has the surrounding shoreline, due to the combined forces of wind, wave, and current. The earliest reference to erosion at Cove Point occurred in 1993 when the concrete seawall was replaced and the concrete seawall replaced several times, the last time in the late 1940s due to storm damage, and were replaced in 1850 for four large groins.

No further mention is made in the records until 1892 when a 340-foot wooden bulkhead was added, consisting of four-inch sheet piling, twelve feet long, driven into the bottom and backed by six-inch wailing pieces bolted to heavy piles twenty-five feet long and driven twelve feet apart. Groins also projected out perpendicular to the seawall. By 1913 a reinforced concrete seawall had replaced the wooden bulkhead. The most recent work occurred in 1993 when the concrete seawall was rebuilt.

Curiously, while the northern and eastern boundaries were eroding, the southern side was accreting or adding property. By 1958 the original two acres on which the station sat had grown to over seven acres.

**Tending the Light**

From 1828 until 1958 twenty civilian keepers of the U. S. Lighthouse Board and its successors served faithfully at Cove Point. Little is known about most of them, although some well-known local names are represented, like Hance, Tonge, and Hagelin. The Gray family, in particular, has a close association with two members, Benjamin N. Gray and Clinton B. Gray, numbering among the keepers with several more as assistant keepers. An assistant keeper was first appointed in 1864, thirty-six years after the station was commissioned. During World War II a third keeper was added, who was a serving member of the U. S. Coast Guard. With three keepers, each worked eight hours on and eight off for forty-eight hours, followed by twenty-four hours off.

Cove Point was attractive duty for many keepers, as they could live with their families, unlike the more lonely offshore lights. A disadvantage, however, was the additional work necessary to keep up the grounds and various buildings. James T. Somers, the last civilian keeper, was interviewed by the Baltimore Sun in 1953; he stated a preference for tending lights on waterbound and isolated lighthouses, as he only had to take care of the living entrances to the station. About the same time the existing brick fog-signal/radio beacon/generator building was constructed, and all machinery moved out of the earlier 1901 wooden structure. The light tower itself has changed little, but was covered with "shocretce" in 1953.

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quarters and the light. "But here you got 11 acres of ground to contend, in addition to the light you have to maintain houses, grounds, paint, be a carpenter as well as having a continuous watch of the light, radio beacon and a continuous stand-by on the radio telephone." Somers retired only five years later.

As reflected in the surviving station logbooks, daily life was governed by a strict routine and endless round of maintenance and upkeep. Regular visits from the lighthouse tender brought many of the staple supplies used at all lighthouse stations (together with a less welcome visit by the inspector). Provisions were also obtained locally from the general stores at Solomons and neighboring communities. With the keepers, one stood watch one day, the other the next, relieving each other at midnight. During fine weather both would help with the upkeep.

Occasionally, some event out of the ordinary would intrude into this orderly world. On August 31, 1886, the keeper reported a slight shock, accompanied by a light tremor that continued for one-and-a-half seconds, the result of the great earthquake at Charleston, South Carolina. On June 18, 1908, the assistant keeper, Grover C. Riggs, saved a man in a small boat, who had attempted to swim ashore after becoming intoxicated and losing his oars. Later that year, the Calvert Journal of December 26 reported the sinking of the schooner Quick Time off Cove Point. According to the newspaper, "Captain Dorman and the crew suffered a great deal from the exposure and narrowly escaped being drowned. When they reached shore they were hospitably cared for by Mr. Daniels, the lighthouse keeper at Cove Point."

One of the more momentous events in recent history was the great storm of August 23, 1933. It struck from the south with little warning and caused considerable damage to the length of the bay. According to the station logbook, two windows were knocked out in the fog signal building, the electric plant was put out of commission, the basement of the keeper’s house was flooded to the windows, four shade trees were uprooted, and the grounds were covered with water and sand to a depth of two-and-one-half feet.

Mr. Horace C. Groom, son of the keeper of the same name, remembers the day vividly. In an interview in February 1997 Horace recalled the sight of a thirty-two-foot boat that had been pulled up on the shore, north of the station, swept up and brought to rest in the trees that had to be cut to get the boat down. This boat was owned by his brother Jack and kept at the station. The goats and chickens belonging to the assistant keeper survived as did the automobiles, even though the water was high enough to damage their interiors. Although the base of the light tower was flooded, the light continued to operate, even at the height of the storm. In the days to come, considerable effort was spent in removing the huge quantity of sand that had been piled up behind the seawall and against the buildings, using scoops pulled by horses and oxen.

Approximately ten years later Cove Point witnessed a different kind of activity as the beaches just south of the lighthouse became the site of large scale practice landings in preparation for amphibious assaults in the European and Pacific Theaters of World War II. Today, Cove Point Lighthouse still serves the needs of the mariner, one of the most familiar of all landmarks to those who sail the great waters of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Future

In early 1996 the Calvert Marine Museum and the U. S. Coast Guard entered into preliminary negotiations whereby the Coast Guard would relinquish title to the property to the Calvert County government. The museum would maintain the lighthouse as a historic attraction with the intention of creating one of the county’s most important maritime heritage centers. The Coast Guard would continue to operate the aids-to-navigation. It is hoped that the final transfer will occur in the summer 1998. Plans call for a caretaker/site manager to be located in the former enlisted quarters (Quarters “C”), and the interior of the 1901 fog signal building converted to a permanent exhibit on the history of the light station. Signage will be strategically located around the complex to interpret the various building and their uses, as well as explaining the surrounding geographic features and man-made environment. Funding for the exhibit and signage has been made possible through a $15,000 grant from the Maryland Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance Program.

Other issues will have to be addressed before Cove Point Lighthouse can be opened to the public: repairs to the various buildings and fences, parking, restrooms, grounds maintenance, and installing security and fire alarm systems as necessary. All this must be done while minimizing the impact on the neighboring residential community and environmentally sensitive shoreline. The transition of Cove Point from a navigational aid with restricted access to a historic site open to the public starts a new and exciting chapter in the history of Maryland’s oldest continuously operating light station.

The author wishes to acknowledge the following organizations for providing access to their archives: The Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland; Historian’s Office, U. S. Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC; The U. S. Coast Guard, Fifth District Headquarters, Portsmouth, Virginia; Coast Guard Activities, Baltimore; and The Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Michaels, Maryland. A brief bibliography of lighthouse sources may be requested from the museum library.
THE CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM CANOE CLUB

"Everyone must believe in something, I believe I'll go canoeing" (Henry David Thoreau)

The origin of the Calvert Marine Museum Canoe Club lies in the "Canoeing for Beginners" classes given in the summers of 1979 and 1980 under the auspices of Dorothy Ordwein, volunteer museum educator. After a request in the spring of 1980 for anyone interested in forming a canoe club, an organizational meeting was held by interested members in July. By fall of 1980, the museum announced that it was officially sponsoring the Canoe Club. Its purpose was to continue the exploration of the local waters by canoe as previously done by the Maryland colonists and Native American tribes resident on the shores of the bays and rivers of the Delmarva area. The early canoes used by the Indians were made either by fastening bark to a wooden frame or by hollowing out tree trunks by burning and removing the embers with stones and shells to form a trough. These early canoes were used mainly by the Indians for off-shore fishing expeditions and as a mode of travel to other tribal areas around the bay. Continuing the trend developed by the Indians, later canoes were primarily hand-crafted of wood, canvas, or birch bark up until the 1940s. The modern canoes used by the club members today are mostly constructed of newer and much sturdier materials such as aluminum, fiberglass, kevlar, and ABS plastic.

The only requirements for membership in CMM's Canoe Club are a dues assessment of $10 per family per year (mainly to cover mailing and other incidental costs) and membership in the Calvert Marine Museum Society. Owning a canoe is not a requirement as the club can furnish a limited number, or can pair you up with someone who needs a paddling partner. The current club membership consists of about thirty-five families ranging in age from seventy years or more down to two years as some of the members are young families who bring their small children with them on the club-sponsored trips. Experience level of the members ranges from beginners to highly experienced.

An early Canoe Club outing, with Dorothy Ordwein shown in the canoe on the right. Photo by Alan Fosa

There are approximately ten trips/activities planned yearly, or about one per month from March through November. Most are on the "brown water" (or calm) rivers and creeks in the tri-county area of Southern Maryland. The club also schedules one or two "white water" (or rivers with rapids) trips for the more adventurous canoeers, usually in eastern Virginia or western Maryland. The whole year's activities are planned and scheduled at our annual planning meeting usually held in early February at the museum. Trip sites are picked, a leader is selected who is responsible for coordinating each trip, dates are selected (usually on a Saturday), and the results published and forwarded to all the members. About a month prior to each trip's scheduled date, details such as meeting time, directions to launching site, etc., are forwarded to all the members.

The actual paddling time for an average trip ranges from two to four hours. Most trips are either preceded or followed by a social event such as a potluck meal or meeting at a restaurant afterwards to hash over the events of the day's trip. Members pitch in at the launch and recovery sites to help with unloading, launching, and reloading the canoes. Usually there will be one or more experienced canoeers available to offer paddling tips to beginners. Many members bring binoculars along on the trip to view the varied flora and fauna indigenous to the rivers, creeks, and marshes. You can expect to see ducks, herons, egrets, kingfishers, ospreys, swans, and if fortunate, beavers, muskrats, otters, and eagles. Wildflowers might include such things as wild iris and marsh grasses, to name a few. In addition to the wildflowers you will see various kinds of trees such as swamp magnolia, white oak, red cedar, red maple, persimmon, wax myrtle, and black gum. If the weather and water conditions are favorable, some of the group will stop and enjoy a swim.

The Canoe Club extends an invitation to one and all to join us in the fun and enjoyment of canoeing the rivers and creeks once traveled by the early inhabitants. Contact Dave Brownlee at 410-326-3645 or Jim Trent at 301-863-6541 for membership information. (Jim Trent)