AN ALTERNATE INDUSTRY FOR SOLOMONS:  
THE CALVERT PACKING COMPANY  

By Robert J. Hurry, CMM Registrar

Editor's Note: This article grew out of research conducted while preparing an application for historic site designation for the former Calvert Packing Company, located north of Solomons Island. The packing company's factory on this site served as the inspiration for the design of the museum's exhibition hall. A study of the building was commissioned from architectural historian Kirk E. Ranzetta, with his information included in the application that is being prepared by Mr. Hurry.

Solomons has been associated with the seafood and boatbuilding industries for much of its history, but a lesser known and shorter lived industry, that of canning tomatoes, was in operation there for brief periods during the early twentieth century. Vegetable and fruit canneries developed in many of the farming areas of the Chesapeake watershed, and southern Calvert County was no exception. Two tomato canneries were established in the vicinity of Solomons that provided local markets for the area's farmers and work for seasonal laborers.

The first tomato cannery near Solomons lasted only four seasons. J. H. Roberts and George W. Johnson established their cannery on Mill Creek in 1903. Acquired by Thomas Moore and son in 1905, it burned in late 1906. Moore then moved the operation across the Patuxent River to Town Creek. There is no known documentation for this cannery. It was nearly two decades before another tomato cannery was built near Solomons.

In April 1925, local businessmen Wilson W. Dowell and Harry B. Trueman, in partnership with banker Halvor H. Hellen, formed the Calvert Packing Company to build and operate a tomato processing and packing plant. Informally known as the Solomons tomato factory, the company provided seasonal labor to a local workforce and created a demand for raw tomatoes that was supplied by many of the area’s farmers. From 1925 until the mid-1930s local tomatoes were processed and shipped by boat from the company’s wharf to various markets under the Leonard Calvert Brand name.

In May 1925 the partners purchased a two-acre lot from Sarah and Joseph C. Webster. It was situated north of Solomons Island on Lime Bank Cove on the west side of Back Creek, including a right-of-way to the nearby public road. A company account book, now in the museum’s archives, records the purchase price as $1,600.00. The partners wasted little time improving the site, beginning with a wharf on Lime Bank Cove to receive shipments of building materials and equipment. Within the first month, the company contracted for a drilled artesian well, employed James L. Townsend of Dorchester County to construct a factory building, and it began to procure the machinery and equipment necessary to operate the business. Townsend and his crew constructed the two-story factory building, a 48-by-80-foot frame structure with a concrete floor, standing seam metal roof, and board and batten siding. The machinery and equipment necessary to operate a canning factory included two steam engines, purchased used from the Charles H. Davis’s packing plant in Benedict, Maryland; a 100-horsepower Erie City boiler from Baltimore; two Panama Closing Machines and a conveyor rented from The Continental Can Company; and other machinery, equipment, and packing-house tools, such as a cooker and scaler. Further purchases included empty wood cases, corrugated cardboard cases, tin cans, tomato baskets, and paper labels (Leonard Calvert Brand and Robinson Brand).

George V. Phillips was hired to operate the packing plant. A September 5, 1925, Calvert Gazette newspaper article states that Phillips was an experienced packing-house operator. Earning $30.00 for a six-day week, it is likely that he was responsible for organizing the layout of the equipment as well as the processing and packing areas. The newspaper article reports that the factory “…was equipped with the most modern machinery known to the business. The arrangement of equipment has been carefully studied with a view of minimizing danger to the employes (sic) and toward operating the plant in a most cleanly and sanitary way.” In addition to the factory itself, the article states that a power plant was located in a nearby building, and describes a separate business office and a combined dining hall, kitchen, and living quarters that were just being completed. Company accounts show that additions to the original building were built over the next few years.

The Southern Maryland Immigration Commission’s Sunny Southern Maryland booklet (undated, but probably 1927) features a photograph of the plant in its prime. The photo shows two small buildings on the rise to the southwest of the factory, a small pier in the cove to its north, and a substantial pier with small warehouse to its east. A tall smokestack indicates the separate power plant building. The photograph depicts the original two-story factory building with

Calvert Packing Company in 1927, as shown Sunny Southern Maryland. Photo by George Ackerman, courtesy Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.
CHAIRMAN’S CORNER

By RoxAnne Riddle Cumberland

The new board is only a few months into its year, but the changes are dramatic. We are blessed with board members who are multitalented, energetic, and motivated, and they are all pitching in to share their particular duties. Committees that have been somewhat dormant have been reactivated, and new ideas are circulated throughout the board. Gregory Wells is leading the Governance Committee by updating our decades-old bylaws; Richard Fischer is forging ahead with plans for the best Bugeye Ball ever; and Jack Pappas is helping to develop the newly created Development Committee that will focus on wider community/county awareness and participation, as well as specific fundraising endeavors. Most importantly, plans are under way to have a member of the Volunteer Council in active liaison with the board. More committee assignments and information will be highlighted in our next Bugeye Times article.

Few people seem aware of the tremendous efforts of our volunteers. Without their help, the presentations and exhibits we have enjoyed for years would not be possible. Last year alone, over fifty-three volunteers worked over one hundred hours each. Eleven volunteers have reached a goal of over one thousand hours—an achievement that was specially recognized by certificates from Governor Parris Glendening. More on the volunteers and staff appear elsewhere in this issue.

Please remember that any questions or concerns may be addressed to me directly by e-mail at Rosy7533@yahoo.com, by fax at 410-326-9716, or by telephone at the museum.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

(Continued from page 8)

Rogers, Marilyn Ruark, Ruth Showalter, Ned Sprague, Margaret Stamper, Wes Stone, Joan Sweeney, Doris Sweet, Don Sweeten, Marcia Swiencinski, Bev Walker, Jim Wilson, Sandra Younger, and Thomas Younger.

Those who reached thousand-hour marks during the past calendar year received certificates from Governor Parris Glendening, name badges with gold stars denoting thousand-hour status, and a small gift. These volunteers were Paul Berry with 16,486.5, Fran Damerell with 1,038, George Halvosa with 1,064.75, Darryl Hansen with 1,015.5, Tom Konrad with 1,000, Bill Lake with 6,499.75, Al Lavish with 4,142.5, Margaret Stamper with 1,010, Doris Sweet with 2,130.15, and Jim Wilson with 1,080.5. A special presentation was made to Doris Berry, who reached 2,500 hours. Maureen Baughman, Museum Store manager, commissioned Skip Edwards to create a carved mirror as a gift. Doris, a long-time volunteer, recently resigned as a store volunteer, but is still active in other museum areas.

The Patuxent Small Craft Guild was the recipient of the Group Achievement Award. For those interested in the history and accomplishments of the guild, maritime history curator Richard Dodds and the exhibit department put together an interesting exhibit highlighting this special group of volunteers. Currently it is on display in the museum lobby. As an award winner, a plaque was carved by Skip Edwards in their honor, and they will be invited to a special evening cruise aboard the Tennis. Members include Paul Adams, William Boxwell, William Cloyes, Christa and Mel Conant, Jonathan Dann, Robert Fleming, Morgan Gates, Tom Konrad, Bill Lake, Al Lavish, Monty Newman, Tony Pettit, Bill Poffenbarger, Richard Rogers, and Jim Wilson.

The 2001 Volunteer of the Year award went to Dave Peterson who was featured in the Volunteer Spotlight in the spring issue of the Bugeye Times. He received a plaque carved by Skip, as well as tickets to the Chicago concert and to all the WWII events in August. Richard Dodds, whose department is often the beneficiary of Dave’s volunteer efforts, included a special gift—a decent paintbrush. According to Mr. Peterson, this was the true honor, as usually his painting supplies are less desirable. He said this with a smile.

(Getty King)

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C. Douglass Alves, Jr., Director
Paul L. Berry, Editor
Other contributors to this issue:
Vanessa Gill, Debra Strozier

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 20688-0097
410-326-2042
FAX 410-326-6691
TDD 410-535-6355
Museum Store: 410-326-2750
www.calvertmarinemuseum.com
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STAFF ACTIVITIES

Maryland Public Television’s program “Outdoors Maryland” in March included a segment on seahorses that featured CMM aquarist Carin Stringer. Carin described her work at the museum in caring for these interesting marine animals, including the difficulties in their breeding and nurturing. To accompany the new museum exhibit on “Sirens & Sireniens” and to expand on the information included there, curator of paleontology Stephen Godfrey has written and the museum has published Sireniens & Sirens: Sea Cows and Mermaids (for sale in the Museum Store for $4.95). Another staff author is CMM’s registrar, Robert J. Hurry, whose 248-page The Discovery and Archeological Investigation of the Benjamin Banneker Homestead, Baltimore County, Maryland has been published by the Maryland Historical Trust Press (available from the Archeological Society of Maryland for $17.50).

Scott Werts, the assistant to the curator of paleontology since January 2001, is leaving to pursue his doctorate at Johns Hopkins University. He will be replaced by William (Bill) Counterman who has volunteered at CMM for several years. Carly Forton, a student at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, is serving as an intern in the museum archives this summer. Seasonal interpreters include Blake Harahush and Patrick Murphy, while William Nichols will serve as mate on the Wm. B. Tennison.
LIGHTS UP THE STAGE IN SOLOMONS

Once upon a beautiful night in Solomons, a starry sky and great music created a magical moment known as Waterside 2002. On June 8, a sold out crowd of over 4,200 came to the museum for the energetic performance of rock legends Chicago. No strangers to the concert stage, the eight members of Chicago put on a stellar show of lively instrumentation, lights, and vocals. Using instruments like the trombone, flute, saxophone, keyboards, and trumpet, the band electrified its enthusiastic audience with favorites like “Saturday In The Park,” “You’re The Inspiration,” and “25 Or 6 To 4.”

Both band and audience seemed to enjoy the cool June evening by the waterside. At one point in the show, one of Chicago’s members even said that this was one of the prettiest places they had been. And at the gate after the show, fans of all ages could be heard shouting “CHICAGO, CHICAGO!”

NEW RATES FOR THE
WM. B. TENNISON

New rates have been set this year for cruises and charters on the museum’s boat the Wm. B. Tennison. Adults will be $6.00; children 5-12 will be $3.00 each; children under 5 will be free when accompanied by a paying adult. Charter rates are now $200 an hour for the first two hours and $100 for all additional hours. Members of the Calvert Marine Museum Society receive a charter discount of 10 percent or more, depending on the category of membership. For further information about Tennison charters, call 410-326-2042, ext. 41; for information about members’ benefits, 410-326-2042, ext. 18.

Cruise hours in 2002 for the Tennison continue as in former years: May through October, 2:00 p.m. cruise every Wednesday through Sunday; weekends in July and August, cruises at 12:30, 2:00, and 3:00 p.m. Charters are available Wednesday through Sunday, mornings and evenings. All cruises are weather permitting, with space on a first-come, first-served basis. The maximum capacity of the Tennison is forty-seven. Accommodations will be made for individuals with disabilities upon reasonable notice.

TRAVIS TRITT TO PLAY CMM IN AUGUST

MEMBERS - ORDER YOUR TICKETS EARLY!

On Saturday, August 31, Ralph’s Dodge-Jeep and Cumberland & Erly, LLC, present Waterside 2002 with country star Travis Tritt. (Opening act will be announced later.). Showtime is at 6:00 p.m., with gates opening at 5:00 p.m. Tickets at $45 for premium and $35 for reserved seating will go on sale August 7 and can be purchased at the Museum Store or through phone charge at 1-800-787-9454, beginning at midnight, August 7 (Tuesday evening).

With twelve #1 hits, two Grammy awards, three CMA awards, and over seventeen million albums sold, Travis Tritt has established himself as one of country music’s most talented, successful, and distinctive artists. Tritt’s latest album returns him to his rightful place at the forefront of today’s country music. At a time when country audiences are looking for something worthy in which to invest their time and money, Tritt’s return with Down the Road I Go is heaven-sent. With this album, Tritt’s pure joy in creating music has never been more evident.

CMM members — don’t miss the opportunity to order tickets in advance of August 7 by mailing or faxing in the order form found inside this issue. Members may order up to eight tickets prior to August 7. Tickets will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis, so for the best seats available, please send in your orders as quickly as possible.

For more information on the Travis Tritt concert, please call the 24-hour information hotline at 410-394-6684. To speak to a staff person, call 410-326-2042, ext. 16, 17, or 18, during business hours.
“Cradle of Invasion” in 2002 Marks Sixtieth Anniversary

Once each year, in August, CMM and Solomons commemorate the “Cradle of Invasion,” recalling the contributions of the U. S. Navy Amphibious Training Base, Solomons, in winning the Second World War. This year is particularly significant since it marks the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the base on the Dowell peninsula across Back Creek from the museum and Solomons. On August 9 to 11 there will be a three-day celebration of the opening of the base, including exhibits, tours, dances, concerts, and an invasion demonstration. The latter will be full-scale landing exercises, complete with landing craft discharging 1940s-clad and equipped marines onto the beach — to help the present generation better understand the part Solomons played in the conflict. Guided tours of the base and other activities will help explain the essential role Solomons played in the war. A vitally important part of the weekend is the presence of many of the “boys” who trained at the base, many of whom last visited the area just before shipping out to war. We are honored to have them and their families with us as we commemorate their participation and the sacrifice of the thousands of their comrades who gave their lives for our country.

Efforts are under way to establish a permanent memorial to the men who served at the base. A seven-foot-tall bronze statue, “On Watch,” has been commissioned, and with the help of friends will soon be in place overlooking the water entrance to the base on Back Creek. Visible to anyone coming or going to Solomons by water, as well as from the land, “On Watch” will ensure that whatever alterations may come to the old peninsula, the presence of the men who trained there will always be remembered and honored.

For a complete listing of activities and times visit the museum’s web site and click on WWII. For further information and tickets call Karen Stone at 410-326-2042, ext.32. (Wes Stone) 

Cutting the ribbon for the opening of the “Sirens and Sirenians” exhibit. From left, consultant Daryl Domning, director Doug Alves, and paleontology curator Stephen Godfrey. CMM photo by Bob Hall

Girl Scout Sinead Kaiser (left) helps supervise T-shirt printing at Family Discovery Day. CMM photo by Bob Hall
Spring Events at CMM

It was an active spring at the museum, with the opening of the “Sirens and Sirenians” exhibit on April 6, a Drum Point Lighthouse “Meet the Keeper” on April 20 and 21, Family Discovery Day on May 4, the antique engine and boat show on May 4 and 5, the Volunteer Recognition program on May 18, the Chicago concert on June 8, and many other events. A few of these are shown here, while the concert and volunteer program are covered in other articles.

The new exhibit attracted many visitors. CMM photo by Bob Hall

The museum’s otter mascot greets young visitors to Family Discovery Day. CMM photo by Bob Hall

A display of outboard engines at the Chesapeake Antique Engine Show. CMM photo by Bob Hall

Antique and classic small boats were also featured at the Chesapeake Antique Engine Show. CMM photo by Bob Hall
an addition featuring a louvered clerestory on its west gable end and a shed wing on its north side. With all the additions, the size of the building reached 112 by 82 feet in its heyday. The main building and 32 by 64 feet of the west wing addition are largely intact today, and there is clear evidence of the original building from concrete foundations and other indications.

The cannery’s workforce varied in size and composition depending on the season, generally from mid-August to mid-October, with local labor employed at the plant. In addition to the plant’s operator, company accounts suggest that the plant management included one or two assistants who may have acted as foremen. A fireman was also employed to operate and maintain the steam engines that provided power to the conveyor system and other machinery. A varying number of men and women were “skinner” who removed the skins from the scalmed tomatoes and prepared them for packing. From four to seven women worked as “packers” who filled and capped the tins of tomatoes, and a couple of women were employed late in the season as “labelers” who pasted the paper labels on the tins. A few men were also engaged as general laborers necessary to handle the baskets of raw tomatoes and cases of packed tomatoes. Outside the factory, the company employed a force of “pickers” to harvest the crop on a leased farm from 1927 through 1929. Depending on the task, some employees, such as the operator and fireman, were hourly employees, while others, such as “pickers” and some “skinner,” were compensated on a piecework basis. Aside from the plant operator and assistant, employment was provided to the seasonal workforce of African American and white men and women for approximately a two-month season. In its first year of operation, over $3,600.00 in wages were paid.

Raw tomatoes were bought by the bushel basket from farmers in the area and shipped by farm wagon or truck, via the lane leading to the public road, or by boat to the cannery’s dock. To meet the demand of the factory, the local newspaper stated, “tomatoes are being raised on most of the farms in the lower part of the county, and thus the farmers are finding another source of income and employment for a large number of our local people.” The packing plant bought its first raw tomatoes on August 17, and during the 1925 season of operation the company account book shows that over 44,000 baskets of raw tomatoes were purchased from local farmers at a rate of 20 to 30 cents per basket. Local farmers earned over $13,000.00 from the sale of raw tomatoes to the company in 1925.

During the 1925 season, 26,000 cases of tomatoes, containing a total of 384,000 two-pound cans, were packed at the company. In September large shipments of 1,000 or more cases each were made to distributors in South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. The remaining inventory of 16,000 cases was sold in smaller shipments destined for markets in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Hampshire, and Maine over the next several months. These smaller shipments were made from a terminal in Baltimore where the company leased warehouse space.

The cannery had a small pier on its north side for smaller vessels and a more substantial pier on its east side, enabling access to deep water on Lime Bank Cove on Back Creek. Machinery, equipment, supplies, and coal were received via schooner, and crates of canned tomatoes were shipped from the factory by schooner. In 1925, schooners hauling freight to and from the company included the Annie Belle, Capt. Alexander Butler; Bohemia, Capt. Dan Riggin; and Wm. M. Powell, Capt. Fred Lankford. (According to a 1982 interview with G. W. Hutchins, Butler was the only African American schooner captain in the area at that time.)

Company accounts indicate that the tomato packing business proved successful for its first several years of operation. Business began dropping off at the end of the decade, however, and the account books do not record any tomatoes canned at the factory from 1932 through 1934. During this hiatus, however, payments were made on recurring costs, such as county property taxes, insurance premiums, and interest payments on bank loans. In 1935, its last year of operation, it was part of the Hillsboro-Queeny Anne Cooperative Corporation. The land remained with the original owners until 1965, but the buildings were used only for storage during this time.

Unfortunately, the eventual fate of this significant local industry is not clear, since the account books cease with the mid-1930s. It is possible that the depression of the 1930s or possibly competition from other similar canneries in the bay area caused the plant to close. Much of the main cannery building survived the years. Soon after the Calvert Marine Museum moved to its present location in 1975, staff examined the building and used its two-story, standing-seam roof as the inspiration for the design for the museum’s exhibition building. Today, the building is used for commercial marine activities. So, even though visitors to Solomons can no longer see the tomato cannery that was active from 1925 until the mid-1930s, they can gain a sense of its appearance from visiting the museum.

One of the steam engines from the cannery is now in CMM’s maritime history exhibit, donated by William Goodwin in 1989. Dick Day, shown, restored the engine. CMM photo by Paula Johnson
YEAR-END APPEAL DONORS 2001
Otter Exhibit Expansion Project

The boards of the Calvert Marine Museum and the Calvert Marine Museum Society, the director, the museum’s staff, and especially our Otter thank the following 194 donors for their contributions of over $17,300. The donations to the Otter exhibit expansion have broken all records and brought in the most support ever. Thanks for your never-ending support.

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A very special thank you to the Prince Family for generously designating Eleanor’s favorite exhibit, the Otter Exhibit, as the recipient of all memorial donations in Eleanor’s name. Their support brought in nearly 12 percent of our total donations.
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT —

The 2001 Volunteer Recognition Reception

"Give and ye shall receive" is not the standard motto for the volunteer world, and most volunteers will tell you that donating one’s time is not about what one receives. The staff at the Calvert Marine Museum, however, does believe in honoring its loyal helpers. One way the staff members show their gratitude is by throwing a grand party, known as the Volunteer Recognition Reception. This year’s was held in the museum lobby and featured catered appetizers and desserts provided by staff members. And though like many May evenings the weather outside had a definite chill to the air, inside the museum walls it was much warmer, due to pleasant camaraderie. As bright as a warm spring afternoon, Channel-7 (ABC Television) senior weatherman Doug Hill graciously presided over the awards ceremony.

Those who worked a hundred or more hours during the calendar year 2001, received certificates. They were Paul Adams, Janet Addiss, Dave Aldridge, Vivian Aldridge, Mary Beaton, Paul Berry, Robert Bohn, Bill Boxwell, Bob Boxwell, Theresa Boxwell, Debbie Carlson, Margaret Clarke, Lori Cole, Fran Damerell, Linda Densmore, Doris Fisk, Richard Gould, Bob Hall, George Halvosa, Liz Halvosa, Darryl Hansen, Philis Hurley, Deed King, Frank King, Mary Konrad, Bill Lake, Al Lavish, Barbara Lojacono, Annie Michnowicz, Shirley Mihursky, Don Miller, Donna Miller, Gale Parks, Francis Person, Dave Peterson, Hazel Pinkerton, Pam Platt, Bill Poffenbarger, Sandy Roberts, Richard

Volunteer of the Year Dave Peterson (left) received his award from Channel-7 weatherman Doug Hill. CMM photo by Bob Hall

The Group Achievement Award winners – the Patuxent Small Craft Guild members. Left to right: Jon Dann, Jim Wilson, Al Lavish, Bill Lake, Paul Adams, Bill Cloyes, and Richard Rogers. (Other guild members are listed in the text.) CMM photo by Bob Hall

Channel-7 weatherman Doug Hill (right) presented awards to the thousand-hour volunteers. Left to right: Bill Lake, Jim Wilson, Al Lavish, Tom Konrad, Paul Berry, and George Halvosa. (Other thousand-hour volunteers are listed in the text.) CMM photo by Bob Hall

Family Discovery Day Successful: The Volunteer Council yard sale netted over $2,200, while the bake sale raised $329. The toy boat building brought $336 in donations to the Patuxent Small Craft Guild. Volunteers make a difference!

CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM

P.O. Box 97
Solomons, MD 20688

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3
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