



**QUARTERLY**  
Summer 2006



*The Old Point Restoration • In Search of Shipyards*



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Volume 4 Number 2

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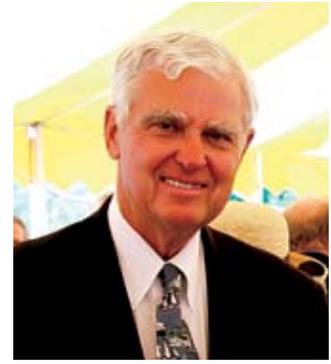
## On the Cover

Boat Yard Program Manager Bob Savage (in hat) and apprentice Steve Albright prepare the latest 15'8" sailing skiff for her ceremonial launching and sea trials. The skiff was built this past winter and spring as part of the Apprentice for a Day boatbuilding program.

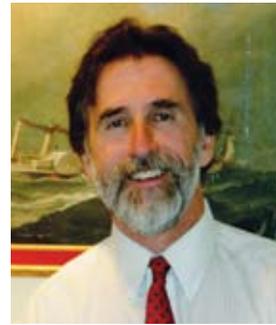
## Chairman's Message

Dear Fellow Museum Members:

This will be the *CBMM Quarterly* magazine's first edition without a message from the President. John Valliant finished his tenure as President of the Museum at the end of our fiscal year on April 30, 2006. He had a distinguished nineteen-year career and leaves the Museum in fine condition for the future.



We have been conducting a national search for the new President with the help of Isaacson, Miller (an executive recruiting firm specializing in the non-profit sector) and the Museum's Transition Team. We have met many outstanding candidates and have selected Stuart L. Parnes as President of the Museum. Stuart comes from a successful museum background at Mystic Seaport Museum and as the Executive Director of the Connecticut River Museum in Essex, CT. He will join our Museum in July of this year. The Executive Committee of the Board and our Board of Governors unanimously approved Stuart Parnes as President of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum at meetings held on May 24, 2006. We welcome Stuart to the Museum.



In the meantime, the Museum continues to progress nicely. The past fiscal year ended with attendance up by 10% from the prior year (most museums are showing negative attendance trends); our membership is close to 7,000 members; and we had a record annual fund. And, as a tribute to John Valliant's leadership, past Chairmen Joe Sener, Breene Kerr, Sumner Parker, Charlie Lea, and I have established a permanent endowment in John's name. The funds will be used at the discretion of the CBMM President for special, unbudgeted opportunities. Stuart will be the first to be able to direct this fund. Congratulations to the superb Museum staff, the Board, the volunteers, and to you, our members, for an outstanding year!

This will be my last message to you as Chairman of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum. I have had the privilege of serving the Museum for some nine years including positions as Treasurer, Vice Chairman, and Chairman. It has been a labor of love.

The Board of Governors will elect a new Chairman, Vice Chairman, and officers at the Annual Meeting on June 19, 2006. These individuals will assist the new President in leading the Museum on to an even better future.

Finally, visit your Museum soon. At Play on the Bay is a major new exhibit and we will be opening a new and expanded changing exhibits program by mid-summer.

As always, thank you for your membership, your encouragement, and your continued generosity and support.

James K. Peterson  
Chairman



# Contents

(Above right) Groundskeeper Jody Frank and volunteer Jayne Kassel add spring plantings to the garden in front of the Bay History building.

## Departments

To the Point	10
Profile	13
Events Calendar*	C 1-4

\* Events Calendar is a special pull-out section that can be found between pages 11 and 12.

## Features

### **Reckless Summer Diversions** 4

What do you do with a gunning houseboat when duck season is over? In 1902 the scow *Reckless* tried its hand as a passenger boat in the resort town of Betterton. By Pete Leshner.

### **Downes Curtis** 6

Objects from sailmaker Downes Curtis's loft will be included in the exhibit *Waters of Despair, Waters of Hope*. We look back at Curtis's life with an excerpt from *The Weather Gauge*. By Douglas Hanks, Jr.

### **The Many Lives of Old Point** 14

Restoring an historic wooden boat exposes the many-layered previous lives of the vessel, while creating new stories for shipwrights, apprentices, and Museum visitors. By Michael Valliant.

### **In Search of Shipyards** 19

The lower Eastern Shore has not historically been known for its ship building operations. But the findings of an archaeology student shed light on a forgotten boat building tradition. By Jason Moser.

# Reckless Summer

By Pete Leshner, *Curator*

Houseboats are typically unhandsome. The more spacious and comfortable they are belowdecks, the more ungainly they often appear on the water. The Chesapeake's sailing scows were no exception. They provided the best accommodations for the wealthy gunners who came from Philadelphia or New York to the Susquehanna Flats in pursuit of canvasback ducks. Though ungainly on the exterior, the cabins of some of these gunning houseboats were legendary: "made of solid mahogany," with "toilet, tables, berths, stove, wine closets, etc."<sup>1</sup> But duck hunting was and is only a part-year activity.

In the warmer months the typical Chesapeake commercial vessel would turn to freight to pay the bills, but a gunning houseboat had little capacity for anything other than passengers. So in the summer of 1902, the gunning scow *Reckless* headed for the summer resort town of Betterton on the banks of the Sassafras River to find passengers.

In these early years of the twentieth century, Betterton swelled from a year round population of a few hundred to a summertime crowd of several thousand. Steamboats running between Baltimore and Philadelphia made Betterton a daily stop, and sometimes the town saw several such boats in the space of a single day. Hotels and boardinghouses opened to accommodate the summer visitors. The Chesapeake Hotel stood right behind the beach, while the Hotel Rigbie, long the largest and grandest in the town, sat on top of the bluff overlooking the beach and river.

Part of Betterton's attraction was a sandy beach along the Sassafras River, where the water was too fresh for the Chesapeake's annual invasion by stinging nettles. It also boasted a pier with an arcade, boat rentals, dancing pavilions, and other entertainment. For those staying at Betterton for a typical two weeks, a day excursion on the scow *Reckless* must have been an enticing diversion from the resort's standard offerings.

*Reckless* was built in 1880 at Havre de Grace, Maryland, like other gunning scows built there



The Reckless

and elsewhere around the prime ducking grounds of the Susquehanna Flats. In 1898 the boat was acquired by the Reckless Yacht Club of Harford County, Maryland, a group of sportsmen and guides organized the same year for "buying, owning, selling, operating, hiring, and leasing sailing fishing and gunning boats and their outfits."<sup>2</sup> J. William O'Neill of Havre de Grace served as secretary of the club and captain of *Reckless*. In addition to the accommodations for eating and sleeping, she was outfitted with sinkboxes and a large rig of decoys as well as layout boats or tenders to set out and retrieve all of that gear. When O'Neill took *Reckless* to Betterton, he must have left the ducking outfit behind, so as not to get in the way of summer excursionists.

*Reckless* continued as a gunning houseboat, possibly with similar summer engagements, until she was sold to Talbot County owners in 1911. In 1920, cannery owner William H. Valliant of Bellevue, Maryland, purchased the scow—despite the big cabin that limited cargo capacity—to carry agricultural products to his plant and canned goods to market until she was damaged by the great August storm of 1933 and abandoned.

1. Richard J. Dodds, "And Then There Were None: The Chesapeake Sailing Scow," *The Weather Gauge* XXVI: 1 (Spring 1990), 7.

2. Harford County Incorporation Records, ALJ 2 / 314.



# Diversions



Same old twins

**Opposite, top:** Reckless anchored on the Sassafras near Betterton with a group of summer excursionists. Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum collection

**Above:** Betterton visitors pose on the foredeck of Reckless. On the left in each photo, an awning is rigged to shade the deck. Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum collection

**Opposite, bottom:** Reckless in her later days, shipping a deckload of fruit for cannery owner William H. Valliant at his Bellevue, Maryland, plant. Gift of John R. Valliant, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum collection

**Below:** Betterton vacationers posed in front of the Hotel Rigbie's porch in August 1902, part of the group that took a trip aboard the sailing scow Reckless. Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum collection

## The Betterton Trip

August  
1902



Those reckless boys and girls.