

#34

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Noble

~~Review~~

Old Home Prize Essay

The Saga of the Bugeys

No. 14

"The slim lines of the bugeye boat  
Better for oystering than anything afloat,  
Built in the heart of Somerset  
The style of her is living yet."

The waters of Somerset County have always lured its men. To follow the water has been a tradition in many of our families. In some, the men folk, both built the boats and made their livelihood from them.

One boat which got its origin in Somerset County, was an oystering craft, known as the bugeye. This was a vessel built only for oyster fishing and it was as different as its name.

The bugeye was not made for beauty or pleasure, but to help advance the men of the Eastern Shore in the oystering business. The oyster is a nondescript cargo, and the boat which furthered its sales, was "an ill-proportioned cross breed."

Professional oystering came into being in the Chesapeake Bay Country in 1760, and in twenty years became a favorite food. The first boats used for this were log dugouts.

When a schooner came from New England to buy the oyster catch, the "tongs" did not fill the holds fast enough. Because of this, a dredge appeared. The light canoe was not able to carry a dredge across an oyster bed.

The boat builders made a more powerful boat but the dredge was prohibited in 1820.

As the demand grew for oysters, the Somerset County men wanted to use the dredge again. Because of this, Maryland legislature repealed the law of 1820, and made dredging legal but steam power illegal. The sail was here to stay. Now larger sailing vessels were needed.

The sloops, schooners and pungys which the men had, were not suitable for oystering. Almost every waterman could use an axe or adze well enough to hew out a canoe. Some carpentering watermen added size, sail, a couple of extra logs, a deck, and a bugeye was born.

There are stories of how that particular name was attached to this new boat. The owner of such a craft was supposed to have said that most people had land buggys but he had a water buggy. This eventually could have become bugeye. There is also a yarn about a certain Captain Clement R. Sterling, who built the first bugeye to sail the Chesapeake Bay. It is said, that someone meeting him on his first trip, hailed him and asked, "What do you call that queer vessel?" To this he said, "Its a bug's eye." Whether a "buggy" or "bug's eye" that boat made history on the Eastern Shore and especially in Somerset County.

The earliest type bugeye was the "Coronet", built at Fishing Island, Somerset County by John Branford, in 1888. She is afloat yet, which shows that her builder was a skillful man. Members of the Branford family still live in Princess Anne. There is a story about a typical Scotchman, who was captain of the "Coronet" at one time. A squall on the bay capsized the boat, and when the men got astride the keel, they observed worm holes and barnacles. Since a steamer was sighted in the distance, their safety was assured. The Scotchman didn't waste any time and when the steamer came up all hands were busy. They were either whittling plugs or scraping barnacles.

This type log bugeye was built until 1895, but even before this, suitable timber was scarce. Because of this scarcity, the men began to frame and plank their boats. One of the first

was made at Solomon's Maryland, in 1879, by James T. Marsh. Another early and well known frame bugeye built in Somerset County was the "Lizzie J. Cox," by John Branford. The men of our county kept trying to improve on their work, and in 1906, Frank Laird of Champ, Maryland launched the longest bugeye ever built. This was known as the "A. Von Nyvenheim." She was 85x23.8x60. His son, Clarence Laird, who now lives in Venton, told me that his father got his logs from Cape Charles for this boat. He said they towed the logs behind a boat until they reached a particular boat yard in Champ, Maryland.

The frame bugeyes varied in detail, but for the most part they were alike. The first step was getting out the keel of sweet gum or white oak. Next came the erection of the stem and stern posts. The frames were double, hewn from "fitches,"<sup>1</sup> as near the proper shape as possible. The bends of a hard wood were added before the "garboard streak"<sup>2</sup> is planked. After the deck beams are shaped and installed, the deck is added. The ceiling is laid lengthwise the boat. This, would now look like a bugeye but many important features such as the "bowsprit"<sup>3</sup> would have to be added.

After the hull was finished, two holes were cut in the deck, one forward and one aft. A smooth pole called the mast, was erected in each hole. Two thirds of the way up the mast are

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1. A piece of curved wood sawed straight through.
  2. The widest piece and from this point the planking was carefully graduated up to the bends.
  3. A long piece of wood pointed at the bow of the boat that took care of the foreward sail.

two lines reaching down to the keel of the boat. These lines or shrouds, as they are called, are joined together by short lines forming a ladder. In front of the foremast is a sail made of heavy duck canvas, called the jib. Between the foremast and the main mast there is the sail, called foresail. On the aftermast is a sail, better known as the main sail. The sails are so rigged, that when the boat changes its course the sails sheft to the other side.

Until 1892 all bugeyes were steered by a tiller, often called the "wagon tongue." These tillers were long enough to allow the man to stand near the cabin, out of the wind and still handle the boat. The first practical steering wheel for the bugeye was patented in 1891 by the Lake Brothers. Still later, bugeyes were made into power boats.

A bugeye before 1908 would have looked strange to me. Far different from the conventional white boats with copper bottoms, the bugeye was often painted "pungy style" with dark green bends and white rail and flesh colored sides. Some were even white and gray with the deck and furnishings of apple green. A few were painted black with the name in contrasting white.

The billet heads were these vessels main decoration. These were carved like eagle heads, sea animals and some times the bust of humans were painted red, gold and flesh color.

Since many of the carpenters were not talented in carving, they either used a simple scroll design on the front, or had some one else make the billet head. One noted maker of these decorations, was Mr. Edward Smith of Oriole, Maryland. Many bugeyes sailed the waters of our shore with his beautiful billet heads mounted on their bows.

The trail boards were decorated. These were often leaf designs, flags or shields. On the trail board was carved the name and many times it was painted a very unrealistic red, green or blue.

When a bugeye was launched, skids of pine poles were prepared by skinning off the bark. These were placed under the boat. To make these skids slippery enough, the men would grease them with hogs lard, fat meat or sometimes bannas skins. A yoke of oxen were hitched to the boat, which they towed to the waters edge or as far as the oxen could go. The oxen were then unhitched and the men folks took over. About a dozen men would get around each side of the boat and push it down into the water. Then the boat would be carried in deep water at a higer tide.

Launching a bugeye was quite an event at the place of building. It took place when most of the work was done on the bugeye. Lemonade and cake were passed for refreshments. The work was all free of charge, and everybody had a grand time talking and singing as they worked.

When an oysterman needed a new bugeye and couldn't build it himself he made an agreement with a ship wright. They generally paid the money in five parts. The first part was paid when the keel was laid, the second when the frames were raised, third when the ceiling was in, fourth when the planking was finished, and the final payment was made when the vessel was delivered.

How many bugeyes were built will never be known. There are lists made but many records were burned in Crisfield in 1881.

Somerset County seems to have been the locality where most of these were built. In fact, Somerset County has the honor of

originating this type boat.

Mr. John Branford of Fairmount was one of our best known builders. He designed his own boats. His boat yard was a typical one. In his tools, as in most of the others, not even a circular saw could be found but he was so skilled that his vessels have been active for more than fifty years.

Although the bugeye was a local craft, it became well known from coast to coast. They were used more and more until the year of 1883-4 when they reached their maximum. When in 1904 the large bugeyes started "buy boating," they had to be changed to suit that trade.

The bugeye lost her bowsprit, long head, mainmast and center-board. The after cabin was built up and bunks added.

These necessary changes made, instead of the graceful bugeye, an ill proportioned craft. Now, she was suited for oystering, both in size and appearance.

The bugeye became famous because of the men of the Eastern Shore. I am proud that my forefathers had a hand in making maritime history.

Bugeyes Built in Somerset County

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
A. Gillis	Somerset Co.	1888	J. W. Bozman
A. E. Parks	Fairmount	1893	
A. J. Nichols	St. Peters	1891	
A. Von Nyvenheim	Champ	1906	Frank Laird
Addie Shores	Somerset Co.	1887	R. J. Shores
Addie	Fairmount	1884	Sneed Parks
Addie Wesley	Somerset Co.	1885	
Agnes	Fairmount	1892	J. Branford
Aliee Cohn	Somerset Co.	1884	B. P. Miles
Aliee E. Walker	Oriole	1888	
Alonzo L. Miles	Somerset Co.	1887	I. H. Bozman
Alvin C. Somers	Oriole	1897	
Annie Cleveland	Somerset Co.	1885	
Annie P. Parks	St. Peters	1888	J. A. Smith
Annie R. Todd	St. Peters	1890	
Ariel	Oriole	1901	
B. P. Miles	Monie	1892	
B. W. Leigh	Oriole	1903	R. L. & B. P. Miles
Belle S. Byrd	Monie	1889	B. P. Miles
Bell Waller	Chance	1886	
Bernardine Williams	Oriole	1893	
Bessie Ford	Somerset Co.	1884	E. S. Wiley
Bessie Lee	Crisfield	1882	
Bessie Leach	Somerset Co.	1880	
Bessie Sommers	Crisfield	1881	

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
Black Hawk	Crisfield	1893	
Blooming Liley	Somerset Co.	1884	E. Shores
Bride	Crisfield	1876	
C. Virginia	Crisfield	1881	
C. F. Miles	Oriole	1909	R. L. Miles
C. H. Mallison	Oriole	1901	
C. J. Thomson	St. Peters	1891	B. P. Miles
C. R. Lewis	Somerset Co.	1887	W. Lawrence
Carrie Colbourne	Oriole	1896	
Carrie L. Shane	Somerset Co.	1884	
Carrie L. Whitting	Crab Island	1890	B. P. Miles
Centennial	Crisfield	1878	
Clarke & Willie	Oriole	1905	
Cora Bell	Somerset Co.	1883	J. Laird
Coral	Somerset Co.	1867	
Coronet	Somerset Co.	1887	E. J. Willing
Coronet	Fishing Is.	1888	J. Branford
Della Townsend	Somerset Co.	1888	J. R. Bozman
Delmay	Somerset Co.	1885	
Dolly Maria	Somerset Co.	1875	
Dorothy A. Parsons Co.	Oriole	1901	B. P. Miles
Drucilla	Somerset Co.	1890	
E. E. Moore	Oriole	1901	
E. S. Mace	Monie	1888	H. A. Bozman
E. Vannah Smith	Somerset Co.	1888	E. J. Shores
Edith Todd	Oriole	1902	
Edith Dryden	Oriole	1892	
Effie C. Smith	Somerset Co.	1885	
Effie M. Laird	Oriole	1892	

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
Elizabeth Rowe	St. Peters	1889	
Emily Snyder	Somerset Co.	1883	
Emma Lawrence	St. Peters	1889	
Estelle	Somerset Co.	1884	B. F. Laird
Ester	Somerset Co.	1891	
Ethel H.	Fairmount	1893	J. Branford
Etta	Crisfield	1881	
Eugene H. Brown	Oriole	1892	B. P. Miles
Eula	Somerset Co.	1875	B. F. Laird
Eva Clarence	Somerset Co.	1887	L. Shores
Eva E. Evans	Fairmount	1893	
Fannie Groverman	Oriole	1892	
Finback	Crisfield	1873	
Flora Belle	Fairmount	1893	J. Branford
Flora M. Willing	St. Peters	1891	
Florence	Somerset Co.	1875	
Florence Rosenbaum	Oriole	1893	
Flossy M. Muir	Oriole	1892	
Frances	Monie	1885	E. J. Shores
Frenchy	Oriole	1900	
G. A. Zirckle	Oriole	1901	
G. P. Leatherbury	St. Peters	1882	J. W. Tyler
G. T. Atkenson	Somerset Co.	1877	
G. Frank Miles	Oriole	1893	B. P. Miles
George Todd	Crisfield	1883	T. Byrd
George A. Albough	Oriole	1896	
George W. Bond	Oriole	1900	
Gladys Whiting	Oriole	1896	B. P. & R. L. Miles
Glendy Stewart	Oriole	1896	B. P. Miles

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
Goldie C	Fishing Is.	1900	J. Branford
Grace	Fairmount	1892	J. Branford
Gracie Wallace	Oriole	1893	
Gussie C	Fairmount	1903	J. Branford
H. L. Tall	Somerset Co.	1887	E. T. Chelton
Hamlet	Fishing Is.	1890	J. Branford
Harry C. Brown	Crisfield	1882	
Hattie Alma	Somerset CO.	1881	
Helen Gertrude	Somerset Co.	1883	
Helen Windsor	Oriole	1900	B. P. Miles
Hester Virginia	Somerset Co.	1868	
I. H. Tawes	Oriole	1901	
Irene	Crisfield	1876	
Irene Cox	Somerset Co.	1884	C. W. Ford
Isaac A. Willing	St. Peters	1883	I. A. Willing
Isaac H. Kuber	Somerset Co.	1885	
Isaac T. Parks	Somerset Co.	1886	
Iva	Somerset Co.	1875	
J. C. Lake	St. Peters	1890	
J. M. Jones	Somerset Co.	1884	J. M. Jones
Jacob Goldstron	Somerset Co.	1891	J. Branford
James Preston	Somerset Co.	1884	
James C. Tawes	Monie	1899	
James O. Wright	Oriole	1901	
James T. Daniel	Monie	1882	
James T. Dennis	Oriole	1889	
Joe Bell	Big Monie Ck.	1887	S. A. Jones & T. R. Muir
Joe Bergen	Monie	1889	
John Branford	Fairmount	1900	J. Branford

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
John S. Smith	Somerset Co.	1884	J. S. Smith
Julia Adeline	Monie	1892	
Julia A. Lanson	Crisfield	1880	
Julian T. Bradshaw	Oriole	1901	
Kathleen Fairmount	Fairmount	1894	J. Branford
Katie Collier	Somerset Co.	1886	
L. E. Coulbourn	Somerset Co.	1882	
L. J. Muir	Somerset Co.	1886	
L. L. Shores	Somerset Co.	1885	
L. O. Muir	Somerset Co.	1888	
Lacy Thoroughgood	St. Peters	1889	
Lady Evans	Somerset Co.	1879	
Laura Hance	St. Peters	1876.	H. H. Willing
Levin J. Wilson	Somerset Co.	1884	A. Laird
Lillian	Fairmount	1892	J. Branford
Lillian C. Cooper	Oriole	1902	B. P. & R. L. Miles
Lillie Francis	Somerset Co.	1884	
Lillie E. Shores	Monie	1888	T. Shores
Lena Cox	Crisfield	1883	
Lizzie Cox	Fishing Is.	1905	J. Branford
Lottie Earl	Oriole	1893	B. P. Miles
Louis Felber	Oriole	1892	
Lucy Walker	Somerset Co.	1884	J. J. Bozman
Lula	Crisfield	1878	
Luray	Oriole	1892	
Luther Hornsby	St. Peters	1891	
Lynn Haven	Crisfield	1878	
M. Estelle	Crisfield	1878	
M. A. Coulbourn	Somerset Co.	1879	

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
M. A. Jones	Somerset Co.	1884	
M. W. Willing	Somerset Co.	1883	
Maggie Lawrence	Monie	1884	
Maggie E. Smith	St. Peters	1891	I. S. Somers
Majestic	Fairmount	1901	J. Branford
Margie Estelle	Oriole	1901	
Manie Hall	Somerset Co.	1883	
Mark Stevens	St. Peters	1888	R. E. Tyler
Martha A. Shores	St. Peters	1889	
Mary Wesley	Somerset Co.	1884	
Mary J. Lewis	Somerset Co.	1886	
Mary L. Gardner	Somerset Co.	1889	
Mary V. Rowe	Somerset Co.	1879	
Mattie Bliss	Somerset Co.	1892	
May Flower	St. Peters	1893	
Milton L. Lankford	Oriole	1902	B. P. & R. L. Miles
Mobjack	Somerset Co.	1874	
Mollie Bell	Crisfield	1887	T. Landon
Moonlight	Somerset Co.	1877	J. Bradshaw
Mystic	Oriole	1892	
Hannie May	Somerset Co.	1887	J. Branford
Nannie White	Somerset Co.	1891	J. Branford
Nellie Reed	Somerset Co.	1883	
Nora E. Lawson	Monie	1896	
Ocean Wave	Somerset Co.	1885	
Olive T. Chelton	Somerset Co.	1884	H. S. Parks
Olive V. Smith	Somerset Co.	1884	G. T. Smith
Orvid F. French	St. Peters	1893	
P. Rasmussen Jr.	St. Peters	1888	J. S. Smith

<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
Paul Jones	Somerset Co.	1877	J. S. Muir
Puritan	Somerset Co.	1866	J. Laird
Queen of the Ocean	Somerset Co.	1872	
Raven	Crisfield	1875	
Rebecca J. White	Somerset Co.	1884	
Reva A. Collow	Oriole	1897	B. P. & R. L. Miles
Richard J. Vetra	Deal Island	1888	G. N. Vetra
Richard Smith	Crisfield	1881	
S. K. Parks	Somerset Co.	1876	
S. T. Muir	Fairmount	1883	
Sadie M. Parks	St. Peters	1891	
Sadie E. K. Gibon	Somerset Co.	1877	
Samuel Somers	Crisfield	1882	
Sarah Blum	Crab Island	1888	L. Shores
Sarah E. Walter	Crisfield	1877	S. Somers
Saucy Jones	Somerset Co.	1884	
Scottish Chief	Somerset Co.	1876	
Sidney Riggen	Oriole	1896	
Silver Spray	Crisfield	1886	
Stella L. Lewis	Oriole	1889	
Sunol	Fishing Is.	1890	J. Branford
Susie Muir	Fishing Is.	1889	J. Branford
Two Bells of S.	Somerset CO.	1887	J. C. Waller
Two Brothers	Somerset Co.	1885	
Two Sisters	Somerset Co.	1887	E. J. Shores
Verdonia	Monie	1890	
W. J. Lockerman	Oriole	1893	
W. L. Muir	St. Peters	1900	
William Euvch	St. Peters	1891	
William Warren	Oriole	1892	

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<u>NAME</u>	<u>WHERE BUILT</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>BUILDER</u>
William A. Eguton	Somerset Co.	1881	W. Lawrence
WM. B. Tenneson	Oriole	1899	B. P. & R. L. Miles
William F. Fnox	Oriole	1901	
William H. Thompson	Somerset Co.	1883	
Wm. J. Griffen	Oriole	1892	
Wm. S. McMaster	Somerset CO.	1883	W. C. Sterling & H. B. Somers
Wm. T. Stalling	Oriole	1892	
Wm. Trickett Giles	St. Peters	1888	B. F. Laird
Willie Clarence	Oriole	1892	
Z. E. Beauchamp	Oriole	1888	J. T. Muir

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S. K. Parks	Somerset Co.	1876	
S. T. Muir	Fairmount	1883	
Sadie M. Parks	St. Peters	1891	
Sadie E. K. Gibon	Somerset Co.	1877	
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William Euvch	St. Peters	1891	
William Warren	Oriole	1892	