

SHADES OF SOMERSET



LAVALLETTE HOUSE

BY JEAN MERSON

Shades Of Somerset



Adams House

By Brandi Clarke

CR

Somerset County Library System
100 Collins Street
Crisfield, MD 21817
CRISFIELD BRANCH

By Jean Merson

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Gordon's:

Where the news gets told.

Long before the first rays have hit Seaside; at 3:30 a.m. exactly, Kenny Evans or Doug Nelson turns the key on the back door of Gordon's in downtown Crisfield. As some establishments are just winding down, the oldest restaurant in Crisfield is just beginning its day.

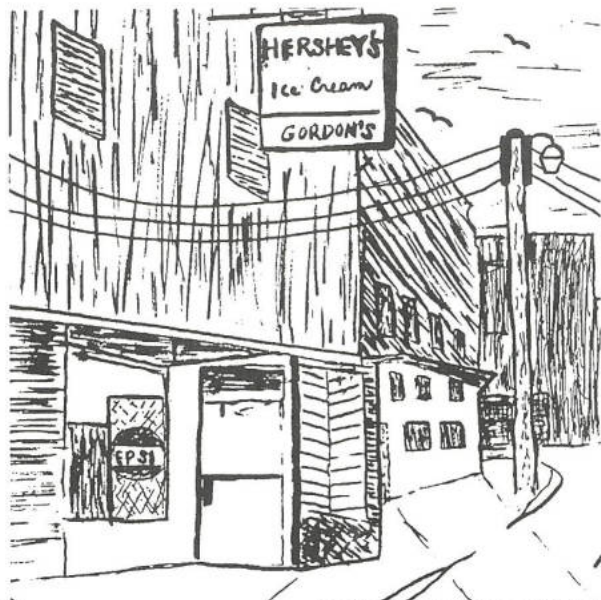
"In the summer the crab-potters and scrapers start coming around four," says Ronnie Lewis, a familiar counterman at Gordon's. "Bobby Hinman from Rubberset and Donnie Brimfield from Heath's Crabpots are usually our first customers in the winter," adds Ronnie's co-worker, Mike Clough.

As the dark morning wears on, Jack Crockett, Buster Somers and son Pal, Carl Lee, David Dize, Wade and Ward Walker, Alan Tyler and Melvin Harris begin to appear. Lester Tyler arrives to order his usual scrapple sandwich. Six-thirty or seven finds Slugger Hinman and Oogie Pruitt

joining the crowd at the center table, or stopping to talk with Ottwell Goldsborough, Donnie Gerald or Elton Massey. Elton is Gordon's oldest customer, or at least the only one who will admit to being 94. Buddy Jones or Jake Merson may be enjoying one of the 5,000 cups of coffee that Kenny estimates he sells a week.

"My supplier claims we sell more coffee than anyone from here to Ocean City," remarks Kenny. His father, Gordon Evans of Smith Island, first opened Gordon's in 1924. A picture of the founder proudly holding a string of good-sized rockfish hangs in the corner. Gordon Evans Sr. died in 1960. "He was a fisherman," claims Miss Joe Nelson, mother of Doug Nelson who became a partner in 1980.

Comments and laughter run thick at Gordon's, even in these tight times: "Up the Bay, if it blows five miles an hour, he'll crawl in the bunk!"...or" Clyde Evans is 83 and he



Gordon's

By Nanette Marshall and Dana Chamberlain

still pulls two scrapes and hardly ever stops the boat..." or "You got to move to catch an oyster; you can't do it with slick cam and no tide..."

Even with the news stand, TV and police scanner, the real news at Gordon's gets told in the booths. In the booth nearest the door, Willis Dryden reflects on the seven degree weather and 40 mph northwest winds: "It's blowing too hard to oyster today. Oysters ain't what they were. You're talking about the first three weeks of the season to make your money. They're making money drudging crabs near Cape Charles, but you can't compete with the Carolinas and Louisiana. Other countries are getting into it now, too."

When questioned about his reasons for remaining a waterman, Willis replies that he likes the feeling of independence, being able to work when he wants to, and not having to answer to anybody. Asked why he comes to Gordon's, Willis quickly responds, "Best coffee in town, as far as I'm concerned. And this is a gathering place for friends and information. There's clammers, oystermen and crabbers all in here right now. You get more information here than you do on a TV report. That's only one man's word, and he ain't out there working."

As the clock moves around to 8, the watermen, like crabs to the eel-grass, head out about the business of their days. The downtown clerks and

white-collar crowd arrive for before-work coffee around 8:30, and the retired folks and "all-dayers" soon follow. Among this esteemed latter group are "Nature Boy" Chuck Bozman, "Lockjaw" James Eliot, Bust Sterling, Buddy Watson and Jado Lewis.

Rubberset workers, Eastern Correctional Institute guards and Maryland Natural Resources police make appearances for call-in orders as breakfast eases into lunch. Officer "Marty" Henry Knierim waits for his order and recalls when he, as an E6 Staff Sergeant, and Bob Troxell, E7 Sergeant First Class, ran their version of Gordon's in a 1229th mess tent in Saudi Arabia. "We called it 'Chez Gordon', but the sign on the tent just read 'Gordon's'."

Three ladies lunching in the first booth proudly claim to be regulars. "I love the place-it's so friendly," says Audrey Ward, backed up by Mary Swift and Nellie Hinman. "Everybody in town eventually comes here. Any Crisfielder who leaves comes back here. My brother and sister-in-law, William and Helen Tilghman, order a

chocolate Zip at Gordon's every time they come home to Crisfield."

The Zip, which comes in chocolate, vanilla or strawberry, was a drink invented by Gordon Evans Sr. "Years ago we used rain water for our coffee," comments Miss Joe. "We made all our own fountain syrups up till Gordon Jr. died," adds Kenny, whose son Kevin also works at Gordon's.

In a world of theme restaurants and potted ferns, the decor of Gordon's has remained essentially the same for the past 70 years. There's a central table with 4-5 heavy metal office chairs, 4 booths and some pin-ball machines lining one wall. On the other side a row of bar stools borders the mirrored lunch counter and grill. Lining the wall is the usual paraphernalia of a diner including coffee and milkshake machines, a wide assortment of snack items, a menu featuring egg and scrapple sandwiches, cheesesteaks, burgers and windings, cigarettes and a sign which firmly states "NO PROFANITY".

Asked if he foresees any major changes at Gordon's in the near future, Kenny is to the point: "I doubt it. We're slow on changes in here."

That's one good piece of news today.

Clyde Evans: Oldest working skipjack captain on the Bay.

"All right, boys-get up. "Time to eat breakfast and get under way." Every morning, those were the first words that sixteen-year-old Clyde Evans heard the cook say when he started culling oysters on his father's skipjack in 1925. He and the five other crew members of the Bessie Loretta would roll out of their bunks in the stern of the boat and eat a good breakfast before winding up the drudges and culling oysters until sunset.

The captain of the Bessie Loretta was Clyde's father, John Abraham Evans. A stern but fair captain, he always divided the proceeds of the catch equally among the crew.

Although sometimes the men would be home and get paid for the weekend, during Clyde's first winter out the crew left in the fall and didn't return home to Smith Island until Christmas.

In the 1950's, Clyde finally had a new skipjack built for himself in Reedville, Virginia. The Hubbard Rice Boatyard always built three boats at a time, and that year they launched City of Crisfield, Somerset, and Clyde's boat, the Lorraine Rose.

Captain Clyde recalls, "She was brand new from the sails to the winding gears, to the drudges, right down to the dishes. Everything was new but the 36 inch steering wheel that I bought off a wreck in North Carolina." Total cost of one fully-equipped skipjack back then: \$10,000. Captain Evans estimates that \$200,000. wouldn't touch the Lorraine Rose brand new today.

In those days, it was the packer who determined a man's worth. Of the 200 or more packers that lined the streets of Crisfield in the '50's, Captain Evans remembers Charlie Houth and Lloyd and Murray Ward the best.



Clyde Evans

By Sara Cross

"Five or six packers would be waiting for us at the dock when we headed in. They'd hold a small auction right there on the dock and the highest price got 'em," recalls Clyde.

Those were the days when the B&O train would be standing at Mariner's road, and box cars loaded with oysters would stretch back to the

depot. "I think it would have been better off to leave the railroad there," Captain Evans states.

Besides hauling out seafood, the train brought in merchandise and coal. Captain Evans particularly remembers "Smug" Goodwin's coal yard that used to be up the street from where Gordon Evans's is now. "I can hear

that engine now, with the horn blowing," smiles Clyde.

But it wasn't all calm days selling oysters at the depot. Just as today, storms arose at times with very little warning, even to an experienced captain. "What would hold a drudger out the most was a nor'easter," says Captain Evans, who remembers cranking in many an anchor during those storms.

Of course winters could be treacherous, too. Captain Evans remembers 1936 when "the Bay froze, the Sound froze, and nothin' didn't move for two months. The mail boat stopped coming to Smith Island."

But it was Hurricane Agnes in the early 1970's that marked some of the highest water Captain Evans has ever seen. During that storm many Islanders lost their boats, but not Captain Evans. He kept going out in the wind and retying his boat higher and higher. Finally, he tied her to the gate post of the Ewell Post Office.

Just as Clyde worked on his father's skipjack, Clyde's son Mickey Evans, worked on the Lorraine Rose. Mickey remembers his father as a fair captain also: "He didn't work you to death, but he made you put in your time. We didn't miss not a day one. We might get blowed back in, but we'd start out every morning."

Mickey remembers fighting the stormy seas with his father captaining the Lorraine Rose. It was calm one morning when they left Cove Point, but suddenly the winds began blowing upwards of 70 mph. They thought

they'd have to beach her. While Joe Kitchen tied himself to the mast, Captain Clyde steered her through with the help of Mickey. Mickey wrapped himself around the davit-a four inch pipe used to haul out the yawl boats- thus breaking the wind and water so that his father could see her safely in.

They lost only a row boat and the tank to the outboard when they had to cut them loose. Several days later, a man walking on Plum Point found both skiff and tank and returned them to Captain Evans.

Mickey also recalls leaving Rock Hall one cold pretty morning before dawn. As the sun rose and the cold wind came up, the crew of the Lorraine Rose watched the ice "knit" together, closing them in. This phenomenon is called "windowglass" or "windowpane" because it shuts you in like a window winding up. When Lorraine Rose was pulled up that spring, two boards had to be fitted into the grooves cut in her sides stem to stern by the "windowglass". This type of ice has been known to actually cut the bottom off a wooden boat.

Next to being aboard, Captain Evans likes nothing better than to hunt duck. "I lived in the marsh over home," he recalls of his days on Smith Island. "I knew Lem and Steve Ward well, and I had a dozen or so of their decoys back when that's what they were used for."

Sitting with him in the blind was his favorite retriever, Spot. "He could see a bunch of ducks

coming and sit just as quiet as you please. I'd shoot, and he'd jump over the blind and one or two at a time he'd retrieve them all."

Captain Evans says he once "knew a man" who operated skiffing guns, the 12 foot black powder muzzle loaders that would fill a boat with ducks with one blast. "It was something to hear four or five skiffing guns go off at the same time," he remembers.

Today Captain Evans, a member of the Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church, lives in a trim house on Pear Street. In the front yard is the anchor of the three-masted schooner, Marvel, which foundered off of Chesapeake Beach drowning over 20 people. Captain Evans caught the anchor in his drudge and hauled her up onto the deck of the Lorraine Rose.

If you can't find Captain Evans at Dockside Restaurant or the Circle Inn, he's probably on his scraping boat Kristy Lynn, hauling in two four foot crab scrapes, which weigh from 100 to 200 pounds, full. He won't use

hydraulics, explaining "On hot days you have to have oilskins because of the oil, mud and water that drop on deck."

Captain Evans's six children all live nearby. Mickey and Kenny are both watermen living on Smith Island. Two of his daughters, Cindy and Lynn, work at the Princess Anne Library. Another son, Roger, is a tug-boat engineer living on Tangier Island, while daughter Genieve lives in Crisfield. His wife, Myrtle, has passed away

And the Lorraine Rose? She's docked at Tilghman's Island and hasn't operated in nine years. Her sister ships, Somerset and City of Crisfield, still operate out of Deals Island.

At 83, Captain Clyde Evans is the oldest remaining skipjack captain still working on the water. Like his father, his sons, and his grandsons, he is a credit to those who make their living on the water.

MeTompkin Seafood:

125 bushels of oysters a day.

Slowly, rhythmically, the 15-foot pile of oyster shells mounts higher outside MeTompkin Seafood. With all else still on the snow-filled 11th Street, the unassuming sound seems part of the slow drip of melting icicles.

Inside the shucking room, the noises approach a roar. As the hopper swings buckets of oysters around to the line workers, Foreman Duane Labo skims, weighs and washes the increasing number of five gallon containers of shucked oysters preparing to go to the canning room. "We've had a great supply of oysters this year," shouts Duane over the din of the machines and the steady click of shells. "We usually work from after crabbing season 'til spring."

Nearby, Duane's girlfriend, Gayle Marshall, sits by a conveyor belt carrying the shells to the growing mountain outside. "I pick up unopened oys-

ters that the shuckers have missed," explains Gayle. She adds that the state buys the shells and replants them so that oysters will "strike" on them for the next season.

In the summer, Duane and Gayle shed the peeler crabs they catch on Duane's 18-foot skiff. They are part of a dwindling number of Crisfielders who make their living year-round in the seafood industry.

Back on the line, the oyster knives are flying as Tommy Maddox, 1993 Seafood Workers' Festival Champion Shucker, uses the skills that helped him shuck 92 oysters in 7 minutes without the help of a breaker this past October.

Beside "Nappy" Harrison Ball, who's worked for the Todd family for 40 years, 26-year MeTompkin veteran Walter Matthews recalls the days before the machinery swung the oysters down the line: "We used to carry



Champion Shucker *By Michelle Arnold*

oysters in wire bushel baskets on wheelbarrows to the line. Now they have this machinery. When there was a full house, we'd have about 40 guys shucking on the line."

Beyond the clatter of the shucking room, 36-year employee George Steward takes care of orders and shipping after the oysters are washed, ladled into cans, stamped and sealed. "In the summer, I have to deal with the 50 women who pick in the crab house," adds George, whose "women" include third-place crab picking champion Ruth Schoolfield and fourth place winner Valerie Stalls.

In the next two rooms, Jerry Lee Culbertson stamps the date on the oyster jar lids while Preston Taylor operates the sealing machine. "Jerry C." says, "I do a little of everything...In

the summer I pack live soft crabs. The 40 cutters and wrappers bring 'em over to me. I pack 'em, ice 'em up, and put straw over 'em for air freight, mainly."

MeTompkin, named for a bay in Virginia, sells seafood to an international market including France, England and Japan, and to cities all over the United States. Ira Todd Sr., a well-known pound-netter and waterman, bought the building, which was a lumber yard, during World War II.

"At first Gordie Sterling and Alonzo Nelson were shucking oysters here," says Ira "I.T." Todd Jr. from his second floor office. "They had about 20 shuckers. There was no crabmeat or soft crabs handled. I just sort of fell into the business when I came back from World War II in 1946. I'd been in Officer Candidate School, in the European Front, Australia, New Guinea and Japan. I never thought I'd run a seafood house."

"I.T., line nine," says second cousin and secretary Jan Todd Caldwell, as one of the phones rings. I.T. picks it up and listens for a moment. "You're talking about special now. No, I want jumbo lump." He flips through an older, well-thumbed ledger with hand entries. After a pause he continues, "Go ahead and bring that up. We'll need it shortly. We don't need any special; we'll get that later."

He hangs up and returns to history: "The oyster business started around 1850 here. At the turn of the century it

was at the zenith. Even as late as 1930-1950 there were many oysters in the Tangier Sound. Within the last ten years we've been getting oysters from the south, mostly the Gulf areas of Louisiana and Texas. Up until the last two years we still handled Bay oysters."

The strength of the southern markets, he says, is that they have the advantage of diversified seafood products. Where the Carolinas, for example, can provide shrimp, fish, crabs and scallops, the Bay's seafood product is slowly narrowing to the crab.

"We buy most of our crabs from the Chesapeake Bay and a few from the Carolinas," mentions I.T., who employs about 70 Crisfielders year-round and 150 at the mid-summer height of the season.

I.T. traces the plight of the Bay oyster to disease. MSX, a disease that cannot tolerate fresh water but thrives in salt water, was first spotted in the Delaware Bay in the 1950's. Since then, MSX has been the subject of endless studies conducted by Rutgers University, the University of Delaware, and the University of Maryland.

"The first real calamity was the MSX in the Delaware Bay," recalls I.T. "Rutgers got started on that study first. There used to be a line just above Tangier Sound, Hoopers Island and the Choptank River. MSX wouldn't be found above this line, but Dermo (a second disease) would take over. Dermo thrives in salt or fresh water. Now both diseases are prevalent throughout the Bay."

Where Crisfield held as many as 204 seafood packing houses in 1912 (according to an advertisement owned by the Somers family), only MeTompkin, Charles W. Howeth, Sidestreet, Jersey Island and Diggs Seafood are still shucking oysters. I.T.'s alone shucks about 125 bushels per day, with an estimated 18,000 bushels for the season.

With typical downplayed Eastern Shore humor, I.T. explains the corporate structure of MeTompkin Bay: "My oldest son Casey is the president of MeTompkin, and my youngest son Michael is the vice-president. My sons do everything. I'm really just a nobody around here."

Decoys:

The bird carvers of Byrdtown

Zack Ward's decoy shed in Byrdtown is a warm stop on a cool Fall day. While nephew Koly Ward rasps a gunning decoy in a vice, son-in-law George Bell pencils in feathers to be painted on a decorative flicker. From beside the kerosene stove, ten-year-old professional hunter "Stormy", a black lab, watches Zack's every move.

The 12 X 15 foot log cabin houses the three carvers, a wide assortment of well-thumbed Audubon books, hatchets, rasps, spoke shaves, draw knives, a vice and a drum sander. From blocks of pine in every corner are birds emerging into various species. On one shelf an unpainted flicker stands perched for flight. Across the room, two Lem Ward-style goosehead bookends support Henry Flickenstein, Jr.'s Decoys of the Mid-Atlantic Region. A legless cardinal lies in a shaft of sunlight from a window where a trio of Pileated woodpeckers perch, awaiting their delivery to Baltimore.

From his chair near the drum sander, Zack discusses his production level: "Last week I did around 30 birds with George and Koly's help. I shipped six to New York, and some to California. I sent a lot to Baltimore, Cambridge and Easton. Everybody does ducks, but we specialize in birds - quail, dove, mockingbirds, hawks, crows, flickers - anything we have a picture for."

Starting around 7 a.m., the three men usually take their own birds from the block of wood all the way to the finished product, which they sign. Zack is proud of his younger relatives' work: "Koly's collected ducks since he was 12. He's been working with me about two years, and he's selling his own, now," says Zack, holding up a snipe that will be ready to paint when his nephew attaches the bill with a dowel rod.

Of his only daughter Jeanie's husband George, Zack recalls, "The first day George saw me painting a duck, I



George Bell, Zach Ward, Koly Ward

By Shannon Heath

made him one and he painted it. Now he's sold birds from Florida to Maine and as far west as Chicago. This has all happened for him in just five years." Zack adds that Bud Ward of Ocean Side, N.Y., one of the country's most active decoy collectors, collects the work of these three Crisfield carvers who never advertise and have built their business by word of mouth.

With the adaptability that is characteristic of many "Down-Neckers", Zack has changed his trade with the shifting economic tides: "I used to be a net-maker in the winter time," he recalls.

"My whole life since I was 16, I made

and mended nets. My father was a fish trapper, and you had to learn to fix your nets. I can still make a pound net or a haul seine. When they put a moratorium on rock (fish) is just about when I switched to decoy-making full time. It had been a hobby for 20 years. I used to give my birds away for Christmas presents."

Although Zack, Koly and George refer frequently to their Audubon drawings, especially for birds that are now extinct, a great deal of Zack's artwork comes from personal observation. He continues, "I spent 30 years hunting ducks and geese. Half of those years I was a professional hunt-

ing guide. That got me real familiar with all these birds. I've seen every bird on this flyway in every position. I've spent my life in this marsh observing birds."

As a man who is very aware of decoy prices today, Zack thinks back in amazement at his casual use of second cousin Lem Ward's decoys: "I used to hunt with six black Lem Ward ducks in 1966. I left 'em in the pond one day and never did retrieve 'em," he recalls, not daring to estimate their worth today.

"And around 1960," he relates, "Me and Uncle Weldon found a Lem Ward goose and took it to Lem. Lem said it was ugly and he wouldn't want to buy nothin' that ugly. He was ashamed he'd made it. It was one of a couple dozen he'd made for some hunting club. So, we sold it to Lloyd Tyler for \$10. That goose today is worth \$10,000 - bottom line!"

The two men who taught Zack to carve, Maynard Tyler and Grason Chesser, both lived in the area. Grason, co-author of Chesapeake Bay Decoys and other books, taught Zack duck-carving. "Chesser gets literally hundreds of orders from the East to West Coasts for wooden hunting decoys," says Zack, who carves mostly birds, but still does a brisk business in the trade Grason taught him. "We just sold one man four dozen stools (decoys). You don't elaborate the feathers or details on a stool."

Zack holds up a gunning stool and continues, "You have to lay a keel on

them and weight it with lead to keep it balanced in the water. We test them before we sell them. We get the basic shape with a hatchet. Then we use a bandsaw and finally we hold them in the vice and use a spoke shave and a draw knife. We leave them rough because paint adheres better through weather to a rough surface. We nail the heads on the old way."

He adds that Crisfield stools are flat-bottomed, while "up-the-Bay" ducks are typically round-bottomed.

Zack holds the highest respect for Maynard Tyler, who has recently passed away. "He made decorative pieces that are comparable to the Ward Brothers' work," declares Zack. "His work is highly sought after. He is shown in many collectors' books." He points out a picture of two Maynard Tyler flickers worth \$2,000. apiece. "These were actual hunting birds," explains Zack. "Maynard is the only one who made open-mouthed flickers. The prettiest piece he made is a flying flicker," says Zack, relating the sad tale of the endangered flicker. "People used to hunt flickers for food. I've hunted them myself. Now they're mostly gone. They made decoys to hunt them with and replicas of these old flicker decoys are real popular now. I have never had enough flickers made."

For the decorative birds, Zack uses mostly white pine from a decoy factory in Virginia. When Rollins Bradshaw of Westover has cedar, Zack buys that. Sometimes he uses basswood, even though it's \$1 a foot

more than pine. "Basically," he says, "You get the shape with a hatchet and rasp. The drum sander takes out the rough marks and we work it down with fine sand paper. We glue and screw the heads on, draw the feathers in, paint it, and mount a lot of them on driftwood."

Since Zack went exclusively to carving five years ago, his business has steadily grown. "All the birds I've got are on order - that's all I work on is birds that are ordered. There's one man who's just ordered 40 different birds. He's a collector, not a dealer.

He'll take any bird we'll make that he doesn't have."

Even with a 25% increase in his prices this year, Zack's orders have still doubled. He plans to build on to his shop this year, as things are getting a little cramped in the log cabin on Byrdtown Road.

From her spot by Zack's feet, Stormy seems to agree with this idea. She'd probably like a little more room to stretch and watch Zack, Koly and George for the 12 hour days she sometimes puts in while they are carving birds.

Tangier:

The only Island Post Office in Virginia

Every afternoon on Tangier Island, a pick-up truck loaded with U.S. mail threads its way down Main Street from Captain Rudy Thomas' mailboat at the ferry docks. It parks just kitty-corner to the Swain Memorial Methodist Church, beside the only island post office in the state of Virginia.

Inside, sorting the mail into the 280 boxes that service 700 islanders, stands 31-year-old Fern Tyler, the first post-mistress in Tangier's history. Watching carefully the stacks of repeating names - Crockett, Pruitt, Parks, Dise, Dize - Fern discusses her career.

"Like just about everyone else here, my father was a waterman. I used to come here everyday after school to pick up our mail. I'd always ask Alonzo "Junior" Moore, who was

the postmaster then, 'When're you going to give me a job here?' When I graduated from Tangier High in 1980, I just kept after it. I took a correspondence course in Administration and Management for Postmasters. I wrote people in Norfolk to say I was interested, but I kept getting back letters saying that nothing was available."

Finally, when Postmaster Moore retired in 1983, Fern filled the junior clerk position under the new postmaster, James Daley. Shortly after this, the senior clerk, Ed Tindall Smith, died under tragic circumstances. Fern recalls that blustery fall day: "His nephew Eddie Williams had been out oystering in his workboat Samantha. He was coming back from Onancock and the weather was bad. It came over the radio that the Samantha was taking on water, so a rescue was led

out by Strickland Crockett. Against advice, Mr. Smith went to help rescue his namesake, Eddie, and he died of a heart attack in the process."

Following the Island's mourning, Fern and five other applicants took the clerk/carrier test to fill Mr. Smith's position. With the highest score, Fern was hired. She now stood a good chance of becoming Post-mistress at the imminent retirement of Postmaster Daley.

From his front porch across from the church, retired Postmaster Daley has a clear view of the Islanders converging on the post office to wait for Fern to finish sorting. "The event of the day at Tangier is getting your mail," says this 25-year post office veteran. "That's where everyone does their socializing because there's always a good group gathered there to pass the news."

Mr. Daley recalls his early days at the post office, a position he came upon following the "New Deal" and his tour of the Pacific in World War II. "I went into the service in 1943. They sent me to New Guinea to prepare for the invasion of the Philippines. When I returned to Tangier in 1945, I took over the Island barber shop that my father and grandfather had operated.



Fern Tyler, 1st Postmistress of Tangier By Sara Cross

"When Postmaster Vernon Spence, an FDR Democrat, saw me one day, he said, 'Alfred Benson (a Republican) usually takes my place when I go on vacation, Jimmy, but he's passed away. Would you be interested in taking my place?' You see, FDR had done away with the practice of changing the postmaster as the political party changed, and the position was now a civil service job."

So, through the retirements of Vernon Spence, and later, Alonzo Moore, Mr. Daley finally became postmaster for the last six of the 25 years he'd put in at the Tangier Post Office.

Across Main Street, workmen repairing the church steeple brace themselves on their scaffolds as the chill blast blows unexpectedly from the north. Mr. Daley recalls the various storms that have assaulted his

island: "I was 12 when the August storm of '33 hit," he relates, referring to a gale that left the upper half of Tangier, known as "The Uppards", submerged to this day. "That was before they named hurricanes. You didn't get no warnings like you do now. We didn't know a thing about it was on its way. We didn't get prepared and it just came right in on us. Boats were being paddled all around Main Street. It was up to my knees on the first floor of our house. The big boats anchored out were all blown ashore. It blew every shanty down in the creek and harbor, and tore some houses down. The old Post Office was built on a little higher ground, so it made it through," he remembers.

At the Post Office, Mr. Daley dealt with several storms that threatened to cut Tangier off completely. "1976-77. That's the year the whole Bay froze over, even the ships' channel. On the Bay side of the Island, all this ice was brought in by the tide. It piled up with each new tide. It got to be about 20 feet high. Mail had to be flown in for eight weeks until the ice began to break up. The Coast Guard brought an ice-cutter in."

In the most recent ice storms this year, Coast Guard cutter Tackle has been busy once again clearing the ice in and around Tangier Island, where ice was six to ten inches thick, one and a half miles out.

But with new warning systems, the Islanders are now sometimes evacuated before a big storm hits. Mr. Daley remembers, "One of the hurricanes, they told me to gather all the money and stamps and take it with me. I took it all to my daughter's place at Onancock."

Besides letters, Mr. Daley has seen everything from election ballots, to live Christmas trees, to baby chicks mailed into and out of Tangier. He recalls, "We used to get live biddies in. Sears & Roebuck and Montgomery Ward would mail them in in small paper boxes for the local Islanders. In the Spring, when everybody came to get their mail, they'd hear the biddies chirping and it made us know that spring wasn't far away. The winters can be long on the Island. It seems longest after Christmas before Spring."

Over at the Post Office, Fern, Mr. Daley's daughter-in-law Delores Daley, and Claudia Parks, have finished sorting the mail. Fern unlocks the door and the Islanders file in, laughing and gossiping, to pay their utility bills and receive news from the mainland.

"I didn't think there'd ever be a lady postmaster," muses Mr. Daley, "Even though I recommended her to take my place. She hit it just right."

Hazel Cropper: World Champion Crabmeat Picker

When nine-year-old Hazel Miles first started picking crabs in 1947, she was in good company: her own family. Her grandmother, Meinne Bishop, picked for Nor Ward Crab House. Her aunts Lena Miles and Annie Bishop, were two of the fastest pickers in Charlie House and Nor Ward respectively in the 1950's. Her sister Byrdie Merrill was one of John Catlin's fastest pickers at Byrd's Seafood around the same time. Hazel joined her sister at Byrd's in 1961 and continued there for thirty years.

"We were just like one big family," Hazel says of Byrd's. "If one of us got sick, we'd take up a collection for the people. We began work with a prayer every morning. And if we had a problem, we could go to our boss and that problem would be solved."

Hazel's immediate supervisor, Mary Sue Yurasko, has remained her favorite employer for these reasons. Although Mrs. Yurasko has passed

away, her family maintains close contact with Hazel.

In those days, as now, a new picker was usually related to a family of pickers. If not directly related, the new girl was sponsored by an older woman, who then became accountable for her behavior and performance as a picker. The new girl would usually start on claw meat, which has a low amount of shell if picked properly. Later, she would move to special, lump and jumbo lump. "Your claw is used mostly for deviled crab and soup," explains Hazel. "One woman comes to Crisfield from Connecticut every Crab Derby just to buy our claw meat for her jambalaya."

The special, or fine meat, is better for crab cakes, while the lump is a half-and-half mixture of special and jumbo lump, or the "breast" of the crab.

Just like her aunts and sister, Hazel quickly developed speed. At the end of her day, she used to turn in 16 to 17

gallons, or 80 plus, pounds of crabmeat. In 1989, Hazel's skill paid off as she picked her way to the title of World Champion Crabmeat Picker in the Crisfield Crab Derby. With 4.45 pounds of Crisfield's white gold in 15 minutes, she beat out seven contenders. She has retained the title for the past four years.

Her first place position has opened up a job for her with William Amarrac, a gourmet food store owner in Pittsburgh. Every year he flies Hazel to his food emporium where she teaches adults and children about Maryland crabs, and shows how to pick them. If you'd like to pick crabs like a champion, follow Hazel's steps:

1. Pull off the claws by hand
2. Pull off the back
3. Take out the belly and eggs
4. Cut off the legs

5. Skim the crab knife across the top and pull the meat out with a knife.

This is the technique that was used to hit Hazel's all-time high of 4.9 pounds in 15 minutes, picked at Crisfield's 1990 Crab Derby.

Hazel is quick to credit the other fast pickers of her profession. "Joyce Fitchett has been first runner-up for Byrd's for seven years, and Mabel Whittington (Frank's Seafood) is very fast even though she doesn't compete."

The best crab to pick is a fat "Jimmy", or male. However, since



Hazel Cropper

By Brandi Clarke

Hazel started picking, she has watched the number and quality of crabs slowly decline. She sees pollution and a Virginia law allowing watermen to catch sponge crabs, those bearing eggs, as the main cause of this trend. Others site the rising demand for soft crabs as a factor. Where there were once a dozen crab houses including Carson's, Milbourne's, Riggin's, Dryden's, Nor Ward, Jimmy Ward, I.T., and Maryland Crab, there are now only six in Crisfield. "The crab houses are slowly dying, and the people need jobs," claims Hazel. "Even the ones working in crab houses are barely making it."

Hazel's salary for the May to November season has dropped to a little over one-third of what it was in better times.

And as the summer heats up and

the crabs come on, rivalries can spring up in the picking room. "If you're picking light crabs and the carrier brings out heavier crabs, you know you're working harder for less meat," says Hazel, who's been known to go to the crab tray and pick up a 50 pound aluminum tub of better crabs and carry them back to her table.

Adding to the pickers woes are the occupational diseases to which they are prone, including tendonitis, bursitis, allergy to crabs and crab poisoning.

Today, Hazel, who loves crab cakes, picks for Charles and Tim Howard at Maryland Crabmeat Co.

The door of her home on Broadway opens and closes on six children, ten grandchildren and one great-grandchild. One granddaughter, Shiwanda Miles, has inherited the family's facility for picking crabs. "I trained her when she was ten to crack claws and she can pick six gallons (30 pounds) a day." proudly proclaims Grandma Hazel.

Asked about machine-picked crabmeat, Hazel has a definite opinion: "A machine does nothing but leave trash in the meat and it's too salty. The human hand is still the best tool for picking crabs."

Harold Howard: Chief of the Pocomokes

"By the end of the 17th century, only the Nanticoke and Choptank Indians were still living on the Eastern Shore of Maryland." (*The Nanticokes*, Frank W. Porter III) Statements like this will be found in the first chapter of many Maryland history books which will open in schools this fall. Do these books tell the whole story? Did other tribes like the Pocomoke disappear? Or did laws repeatedly classifying Native Americans as "black" or "white" for the segregated schools that existed before the 1960's obscure the Indians in our midst?

Living among us in Crisfield today is Chief Harold Howard, Chief of the Pocomoke Indians. His son, John Howard, gives evidence that it was not wise to admit to one's Indian nationality on the Eastern Shore: "In the 1700's, if a white hunter met an Indian in the woods, the Indian was required to turn his game over to the white man. As late as 1952, a \$25. bounty was offered to anyone killing an Indian."

John Howard has studied the histories of the tribes who are his people's ancestors. He, his father, and his brothers are very much alive and descended from three prominent tribes of the Eastern Shore. "Our blood lines mix with three tribes," says John, who has traced his genealogy through seven generations. "The Occahannocks were an island tribe," he begins. "Crisfield was the home port and islands like Smith Island were training camps for the boys. When the boys were seven years old, they were taken to the islands to learn hunting, fishing and self-survival. When the older braves judged them able to maintain a family, they returned to the Crisfield area to marry."

He adds that the site of the last village of the Occahannocks was near Low Woods and is still considered a sacred place. Oblong huts, long houses and tribal schools all closed in the early 1900's because their land was confiscated by the county.

"The second tribe," continues



Chief Howard and John Howard

By Shari Reichart

John, "Were the Susquehanna, who were an intermediary tribe between the northern tribes and the southern. They spoke both the Iroquoian language of the Pennsylvania tribes and the Algonquin language of the Eastern Shore. The Susquehanna were the middle-men for the trade between these tribes. The Bay tribes sent furs and canoes north in exchange for the tools of the Pennsylvania tribes."

The third tribe that contributed to the Howard blood line was the Pocomoke. "Near the boat ramp at Shelltown was the heart of the main Pocomoke village," recounts John. "The Pocomoke Confederation was made up of Manokin, Quandocquan, Marumscoc, Aquittia, Nasataque, and Gigateague (Chincoteague)."

The Pocomoke was one of almost

twenty such confederations that included about 100 tribes. The leader of these confederations before 1722 was Powhatan, father of Pocahontas, in Tidewater, Virginia. "Powhatan was like a president of the lower Bay Indian tribes. His power extended as far north as Deal Island and as far south as North Carolina," says John.

The Howards married into the Pocomokes in the late 1700's when John's great-great-grandfather on the Lawson side chose as his second wife the daughter of the Pocomoke chief. Her name was Manoka Manoka, which means "make peace". John thinks that she was named after Makepeace, because it had long been a trading post for various tribes and settlers. On a typical trading day at Makepeace, members of the Manokin, Occahannok, Quandocquan and Marumscoc might be found haggling over the wares on their trading blankets.

Although he uses books for his research, a primary source of John's information is the tribe's oral history. John can remember listening to the elders at family picnics while the other children played. "I was consumed with the past when I was five years old," admits John. He considers this trait a gift, and says it runs in his family. "My Aunt Hattie Jane Tyler was a treasure of information. She could recite family history to the 1500's on the Pocomoke side and the 1600's on the Occahannok side."

Although he has no children, John has noticed that his nephew Norris, a

state investigator for the public defender's office, "...thinks like me. In a few more years his interest in the past may develop like mine did."

For fifteen years John has been speaking publicly at schools, colleges, Boy Scout troops, Daughters of the American Revolution, Pow Wows, and banquets. He refuses money because the past should be made known. "I figure I got this information from the past, and it is my duty to pass it on," he explains. "And I don't collect artifacts. My artifacts are history."

Concerning the Native American movement today, John centers on three main issues: "First, burial rights are not protected in this state like they are in Delaware and Virginia. Unless a burial mound is on state property, it is open game to the casual souvenir hunter."

Secondly, John says that the Native Americans have the same problems as other minorities when it comes to jobs.

The third issue that John discusses is presently being spear-headed by his older brother Red Jacket, the Assistant

Chief of the Pocomokes. Red Jacket seeks a combination museum/workshop/and central gathering place for local Native Americans. The problem is the location. The Pocomoke were artificially divided by the white man's state boundaries. Ideally, the museum should be built on land that straddles the Maryland/Virginia border, posing dual-state law, tax and ordinance problems.

In pointing out the virtues of the Indian way of life, John reminds us that his people had to hunt and fish to survive. Knowing this, they adapted their way of life to that of animals, thus keeping the balance of nature. For example, the Susquehanna would send exact orders for furs and canoes, so that there would be no waste. The settlers, in contrast, destroyed the bear population of the Eastern Shore in a relatively short time after they arrived.

And, like the animals, the Native Americans would fight over land use, but not land ownership. Owning land was the white man's concept. "And," adds Chief Howard, "when the Indians ran the country, we weren't in debt."

Shades of Somerset

They sit in solitary fields, gray and weathered, with ancient elms and poplars protecting their secret demise. Sometimes, just a chimney remains. What tales do these old Somerset homes have to tell? What stories do they hold that were never laid to rest.....

Like fingers growing from the very earth of Marumscot, the vines climb up to strangle the remains of the Adams House. At a safe distance across the soybean fields, neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Al Church recall the tragedy that still haunts this house on Cornstack Road: "About forty years ago a man shot his wife in the stomach with a shotgun. She held a pillow over her stomach and ran out into the yard. Her ghost is still supposed to appear in that place," relates Mr. Church. "Now," he continues, "Only a pack of wild dogs roam that area."

On down near Tull's Corner, just before the Mill Dam Bridge where the cries of a drowned child are still said to be heard, two Tull houses face each other with a century of secrets that only they can share. Sixteen-year-old

Melissa Megronigle, whose parents Steve and Karen bought Big Sam Tull's house in 1989, tells a strange tale about her new home: "We've heard things in the kitchen. Sometimes when you're in the kitchen, you can hear the sound of children's feet going up and down the steps in the morning.

"One day my mom was in the sewing room behind the upstairs bathroom and she was alone in the house. She heard the sounds of a party coming from the kitchen, complete with people laughing and a piano playing."

Perhaps strangest of all is the cryptic inscription dated 1881 that is carved in the Megronigle attic door. It reads, "All gone to the Fair but me." It is signed Minnie and Olive Tull. In Woodrow Wilson's book about Quindocqua, a Minnie Tull and an Olive May Tull are listed as two of fifteen children born to Justice of the Peace "Big" Sam Tull and his wife Maria, former residents of the Megronigle home in the 1800's.

The Tull children may be communicating with our century in other ways. Melissa continues, "In our guest

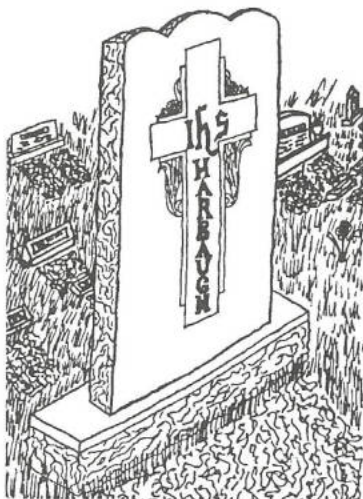
bedroom, facing the backyard, guests have complained that they can't get to sleep because they keep hearing tiny whispers. And one night my parents heard six little knocks in a row from behind the attic door."

Across the street, the Frank Tull house sits empty. Or is it? According to Mr. Megronigle, one of the Tull women had caught fire in that house, and another Tull had committed suicide. How easily do their spirits rest on L.Q. Powell Road?

Moving south towards Holland's Crossing Road, the weathered graves of St. Paul's Episcopal Church sit filed in disarray awaiting judgement. The so-called "Luke's Grave" seems to grow eerily from the trunk of a large fir tree near the spiked black wrought-iron fence. (Some say that Luke's Grave lies across the road and off to itself. They say that a man's profile may be seen in the cracks of the concrete casing.) Generations of Crisfielders have claimed that Luke's Grave is haunted. Mike Lawson recalls, "One night when we were in high school, there was a full moon. A bunch of us decided to leave a tape recorder at Luke's Grave. When we played the tape in our car later, you could hear chains rattling and people shrieking and shouting. It really sounded like someone was being tortured."

Traveling on toward Crisfield down Rt. 413, a right hand turn onto Rt. 667 will wind slowly to a place called "Harbaugh's". Jessie Long, who owns property adjoining the

Harbaugh acreage, recalls this family from Somerset's past: "Charles and Mary Harbaugh first came here in the early 1900's. He was on the police force in Baltimore and retired here as



By Jarvis Stern

a gentleman farmer. They lived briefly in Quindocqua before they bought 300 acres of mostly marshy ground that fronted several miles on Jones Creek. They had a horse and buggy for a long time.

"They kept to themselves. They were Catholics, and there weren't many Catholics around here. The mother she could make friends but the father and sons were on the rough side. They had one daughter. The son, Jack Harbaugh, was a state policeman, and they all liked guns a lot. Nobody bothered them and it was a two-way street. The last one, Jack just up and

left the place around the 30's. About fifteen years ago some kids came down on a Sunday night and burned the place down."

Connie Gerald recalls a night at Harbaugh's that she will never forget: "Thirteen of us girls spent the night there for a school project. It was close to Halloween Night in 1973. Harbaugh's was a two-story house with a parlor, living room and dining room downstairs in the front section. A whole other two story section had been built on the back, and was connected to the front by a one-story room. You couldn't get from the second story of one part to the second story of the other part. We went through the whole house with candle light. My friend Karen and I led everyone. The other girls were Beverly, Barbara, Tish, Lola and seven more.

"There was a little hallway in the back section that led to a creepy little room. We stayed in the parlor because we figured that's where they laid out their dead. During the night we heard a scream. None of us wanted to investigate. Later we heard a big weight fall. Karen and I did go out to look, but we found nothing. By two o'clock there were only five of us left. The rest had gone home."

Connie adds that a murder/suicide was supposed to have occurred in the Harbaugh House. The girls held a seance in the parlor, but did not suc-

ceed in contacting the former residents.

As all things in Crisfield, our next ghost appears along the water. In the early 1700's, an unfortunate soul known only as "Old Ailsey" bent to light her fire on a cool evening the last of October. A spark caught her dress and Mrs. Ailsey became a human torch. She rushed out of her house and perished on Long Acre near Flatecap Marsh. Old Ailsey's Light is still said to be seen across Long Acre on clear Halloween nights.

And far out on Hammock Point, Albert LaVallette's House keeps a vigilant watch on all boats approaching Crisfield. About fifteen years ago, a Mrs. Staples lived at LaVallette's. One stormy night she awaited a visitor who never arrived. He'd lost control of his car which slid into the ditch and became submerged in weeds and water. A day-and-a-half later, he was found and removed, but his spirit is still said to walk the lonely road to LaVallette's.

Apparently not all the shades of Somerset met such a tragic end. One seems to have had a gift for entertainment, and couldn't bear to leave his earthly audience. At 75 Richardson Avenue, various residents have reportedly awakened to the sound of banjo music. Perched on a chest of drawers sits a little man playing for all he's worth from the twilight of the hereafter.

Reverend Daniels: *Fisher of Men*

The question drifts up through the smoke and din of Gordon's: "How'd the Preacher do today?" On most days, the Preacher, Rev. Robert Daniels, does very well.

"Hard work. That's all the water is; hard work. If a man will go out on the water and put in the time, it will pay off. You have to go in all weather; you can't let the weather stop you," says Rev. Daniels, who starts at 3 a.m. and puts in 15 hours a day, six days a week.

Born on Deal Island, Robert worked for his father, Art Daniels, who still captains the skipjack City of Crisfield. His brother, Stan Daniels, captains the skipjack Howard, while Robert himself captained the skipjack Stanley Norman. "My people have worked the water as far back as anyone can remember," explains Rev. Daniels. "There is no life like the water."

In 1969 Captain Daniels felt a sec-

ond calling, that of the ministry. He became a Wesleyan minister, selling the Stanley Norman because of the months that it would take him away from his flock.

An opening soon arose for a minister at the Wesleyan Church in Crisfield, so Rev. Daniels, his wife Janice, and their three small boys, Eddie, Bobby and Jonathan, headed to the section of Crisfield known as "Down Neck".

When I moved here twenty years ago, just about all of my parishioners worked the water like I did," remembers Rev. Daniels. "Today, only Wayne Labo and myself still follow the water," he adds. His boys, who worked with their father for years, have moved to steadier occupations. Eddie and Bobby are guards at Eastern Correctional Institute, while Jonathan is a carpenter. Only Jason, born in Crisfield, remains on the water with his father.

With the help of Timmy Tull, Ronny Pruitt, John Jones, and Stephen Emily, Rev. Daniels and Jason fish 1,000 pots and hand scrape also. This takes up to five months a year, but as Rev. Daniels admits, "A young man has got to work more than five months of the year to survive on the water. When I moved here, it cost about \$1,000 to get started working on the water. Today it would cost you \$50,000 for a boat, shanty and 300 pots."

Except for the initial investment, Rev. Daniels doesn't find that working on the water changes much. He points out that shaft tongs and hand-pulled scrapes are the same as they've always been. Even skipjacks are still required to work three days a week by sail. One improvement he does concede is on-shore shedding of soft crabs. "The old outdoor floats were 4 by 10 wooden boxes tied to poles in the water. The electric lights over the top of the floats were dangerous. You had to lean over from boats to fish up in all kinds of weather, and fight eels and seagulls. Once a week you had to pull them up and clean them," Rev. Daniels remembers of one of his least favorite jobs.

Today, the onshore shedding facilities offered at I.T.'s, Frank's Seafood, Dryden's and Handy's are cool, convenient and safer. Other watermen maintain their own onshore shedding facilities.

As a waterman known for consistently catching his limit, Rev. Daniels

has some interesting observations about aquatic life in our area: "There's nothing wrong with the Bay!" he assures us. "There's more life in the Bay today than in all the forty years I've worked her. There are more crabs on the bottom since I've ever knew. Hardheads (croakers) are plentiful and there's lots of flounder. Just the oysters have gone, but the eel grass is back and it filters the water, too."

Rev. Daniels isn't worried about the oysters, because he's seen them come and go. In 1961, he had to leave Deal Island and go up the Bay every winter. The oysters then were in the Choptank River, but there were none in the Sound. In 1978, however, the oysters returned so plentifully off Deal Island that he'd catch his 150 bushel skipjack limit by dinnertime (noon).

Rev. Daniels has seen similar patterns with the crabs: "In 1963 crabs were so scarce you couldn't catch any. You had to go to shoal water in a sneak boat and catch maybe one bushel with a dip net." Yet this year, he emphasizes, is the best year for crabs that he has ever seen.

A busy man seven days a week, Rev. Daniels doesn't have much chance to visit Annapolis. But if he could say one thing to the legislators, Rev. Robert Daniels would like to say, "We don't need any more laws and no more regulations. The Bay will take care of itself, especially on the crabbing!"

Ken Sterling: ...and the Railway Express

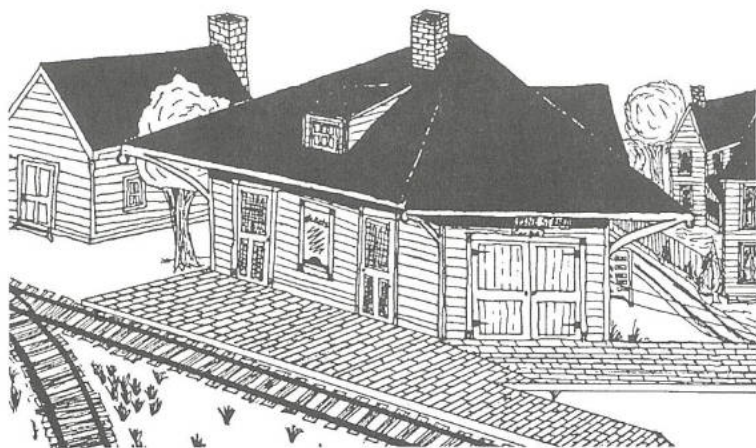
In 1925 a rangy 16-year-old named Ken Sterling graduated from Crisfield High, which then stood at the site of the present elementary school. His classmate, "Buffalo" Bill Quinn, grand marshall of this year's Crab Derby Parade, went on to a career in the military. Ken headed downtown to the Railway Express Agency at the present site of Captain's Galley, where Agent Joe Pinto hired him.

"When I first started I delivered freight in a horse and wagon," says Ken. "I earned \$12. for four days a week. I mostly delivered packages to the stores. You can't believe how Main Street looked then. You couldn't get through to the ten-cent store. You couldn't move on the sidewalks to get from the bowling alley to a dance place. One dance place was the Cozy Corner. It was also a soda fountain and it had two pool tables. There were three theaters in town, two bowling alleys and three dance halls."

The Railway Express Agency stabled their horses at Joe Polette's stable, which was located between Mt. Pleasant Church and Second Street. "Most people stabled their horses at home," recalls Ken from his Lawsonia home. "I don't know why," he continues, "But every horse we got, no matter what its name was, when it got to Crisfield it was called 'Barney'"

Soon Ken was loading the outgoing Pennsylvania Railroad cars. He remembers these busy afternoons at the docks; "All the seafood from Jersey Island, Hoptown and the County Wharf was delivered to our platform by horse and wagon. We would load this after waybills were attached telling the delivery location and express charges. It was my job to attach the waybills and load the freight."

Besides the local seafood, the Island shipments would arrive in the morning: "Boats from Tangier and Smith Island delivered seafood, mail,



Pine Street Station

By Matt Powell

and passengers between 8 and 9 a.m. They had two mailboats from Smith Island run by the Whitelock family. One was the Island Belle. The Tangier boat, J.E. Stevens, was operated by the Thomas family. I remember Captain John Thomas very well.

"On Saturdays we would go to Smith Island for baseball games when I was about 17," he continues. "We would stay overnight and come home Monday morning. There were no tourists and the boats didn't ride nor the trains run on a Sunday."

On working day afternoons, the steamboats from Baltimore would arrive after their long loop down the Western Shore of Virginia and back up Virginia's Eastern Shore. "On the way back up to Baltimore," recalls Ken, "they'd dock on the freight-

house side of the wharf and we'd load them up with seafood," recalls Ken.

Loading the steamboats was easy compared to the tricky business of loading the P.R.R. freight cars. As Ken remembers, "We had to double-tier 20-gallon barrels of live crabs and crabmeat. That would take up about two express cars. One more express car was loaded both sides with live soft crabs. There'd be 80 pound boxes on the floor, 60 pound boxes above that, 40 pound boxes above that and so on. A narrow aisle was left between these stacked trays."

The same seafood houses that packed crabs would ship sometimes twenty boxcar loads of oysters out in the fall and winter. Ken remembers MeTompkin Bay, Milbourne Oyster and George A. Christy & Son. The

last one was the seafood house farthest down on Jersey Island.

The trains ran three times a day, around 6 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m., bringing in supplies such as coal, oil, gas and dry goods. They traveled along where the drainage ditch now runs between Maryland and Richardson Avenues. Their first stop was the Pine Street Station behind the Post Office. Ken recalls Algie Wilson meeting the noon train with a pushcart full of mail. After transferring this to the train, Algie would haul the incoming mail back into the post office for sorting. At Pine Street, the passengers would also board the train and disembark..

The train would then head to the circular track at Hoptown, which is the area down the road from the present liquor dispensary. At Hoptown it would turn around and back the express and freight cars into the dock area.

The freight house itself was built over the end of the dock. Ken recalls, "It was a big low flat building that covered the area where the covered dock is now." Two tracks extended out over the water as far as the freight house did. After the cars were loaded, the fireman would stoke up the engine. The crew might include Engineer George Hollowell, Fireman Herb Johnson, Baggage Master John Ward and Conductor Milbourne. With a belch of steam and a long whistle, the noon train would pull out of Crisfield.

At Marion, the train would put off cars. "They'd load maybe two full cars with strawberries," recalls Ken.

Next the train would stop at King's Creek, just past the present Eastern Correctional Institute. "There was a circular track there where our shipments were transferred to northbound cars and our empty cars picked up some southbound freight," says Ken, who sometimes rode that far to finish fixing the waybills on fresh seafood brought to the depot at the last possible moment.

After all the Crisfield freight was transferred to the train from Cape Charles, any number of mainline engineers like Noy Lawson of Crisfield would carry the freight to Delmar. Ken's contemporary, Wells Somers, remembers George Hollowell as an engineer with a particularly heavy foot: "George Hollowell ran on the main line from Cape Charles to Delmar," recalls Wells. "One night there was a thunder squall near Onley, Virginia. A tree blew down across the north and south tracks. George never slowed down, and he derailed the engine when he hit that tree. A steam line broke and he got scalded real bad on the face. They put him on the branchline to Crisfield, thinking that would slow him down, but it didn't. George would still be shoveling in coal when he hit Ward's Crossing. He'd have to really brake to stop in time at the depot."

Although the railroad was Ken's life for forty years, like all Crisfielders, he was never far from the water. "Everything was under canvas when I was young," declares this octogenarian. "There were no motorboats. My

"Everything was under canvas when I was young," declares this octogenarian. "There were no motorboats. My father had a 28 foot bateau about 8 foot wide. You depended on the wind. If it died down, you had to paddle home.

One day my dad got on some oysters and didn't want to leave that spot. Late in the afternoon when he came home he was mighty hungry. My mother made up some lard biscuits and cooked him some eggs. By the time he got up he'd consumed one dozen eggs and 22 biscuits. We didn't know anything about cholesterol back then!"

Ken can't recall the year, but one bad winter has stuck in his mind. "Back then we could ice skate and all the kids had sleds. But the worst I remember it froze (Ape's Hole) creek, and there was an iceberg in the middle of Pocomoke Sound. A man named Webb White took off on the ice from Ape's Hole Creek chasing an otter. He went all the way to that iceberg, but the otter slipped into a crack in the iceberg and got away."

By 1958, Ken Sterling was promoted to Railway Express Agent.

The station moved to Main and 9th, the present location of Captain's Carry Out. Shortly after this, the downtown trains stopped running in Crisfield. "When the seafood houses got their own refrigerated trucks," says Ken, "That was the death of the railroad."

The Agency remained, but, as Ken says, "We had to load everything onto trucks and freight it out of Princess Anne. When I found out they were taking the railroad out, I didn't like it. The cars and trucks didn't really have any roads to travel on. It took 20 minutes longer to travel the back roads to Princess Anne than it does to ride 413 today."

Today Ken proudly displays his red and gold 40 year pin from the Railway Express Agency. He lives Down Neck in the house he was born in, where he and Madeline, his wife of 48 years raised their sons Ken and Larry. At 84, Ken, a member of the Asbury United Methodist Church, still enjoys an afternoon of fishing on Ape's Hole Creek and the Pocomoke Sound.

Crisfield Coast Guard:

...breaks the ice

Sitting on the south side of Somers Cove Marina, the U.S. Coast Guard Station adds a reassuring note to Crisfield's waterfront. In the late 30's, before the Coast Guard came to Crisfield, the town had to await help from Portsmouth or Baltimore when things froze up.

Around 1937 when the Sound froze clear to Smith Island, the local people decided to sled groceries across to the Islanders. Ed Thornton, who is now 89, remembers that tragic day: "Albert Rich was a state cop who went out on the ice with his motorcycle. His motorcycle went out from under him. An Officer Hunter went right through an air pocket and drowned."

Set up in trailers soon after this incident, today's permanent Coast Guard Station Crisfield has three units. Chief Scott Howie, the host commander, is in charge of search and rescue, law enforcement, and marine

environmental response. Senior Chief Richard Marlow, of the Chokeberry, is in charge of the upkeep of channel markers, buoys and other aids to navigation. Boatswain's Mate Chief Frank Applegate is in charge of law enforcement and ice breaking.

"I came here from Chincoteague in 1977 because of the ice," says Chief Applegate, who's on his third tour in Crisfield. "I remember the first cold front in December, 1976. The ice lasted until the middle of February. The whole Tangier Sound froze, but our 45-foot buoy boat was not capable of cutting the ice. The only thing open was the Chesapeake Channel, which was only about 500 feet wide."

By 1981, the 65-foot cutter Tackle had arrived in Crisfield. With a 3/16-inch reinforced, hardened steel hull, and a 1-CAT D-375 motor with 400 shaft horsepower, the Coast Guard was now ready to cut some ice.

This winter, the crew of the Tackle has been kept more than busy.

With her paint scraped off to the 7-foot draft mark, the Tackle has some tales to tell. First year Seaman Ben Sellers of Asheville, N.C. says "I was on the boat when she went to Tangier. It was frozen outside number one buoy."

Chief Applegate concurs, "It was frozen about one-and-a-half miles out, six to ten inches thick. There was a 50% coverage in the Tangier Sound."

With a 6 and 1/2 foot draft, the Tackle can clear ice in and around Tangier, but not in the shallow channels of Smith Island. The state boat, J. Millard Tawes, has a 4 and 1/2 foot draft that will clear the bottom and cut the ice around Smith Island.

But it was January 28 through February 6 of this year, when the Tackle was deployed to Baltimore, that really tested her captain and crew. "I've seen ice in '86 through '89," says Chief Applegate, "But I've never seen anything like this since I've been on the Tackle. There was stuff up there we just couldn't do. It was within our capabilities to cut that ice (stationary), but it was moving. 400-shaft h.p. is no h.p. to move that kind of ice."

As the ice flow drifted south from Baltimore, the Tackle, heading north, was caught in the middle of it. Chief Applegate had to keep his bow pointed

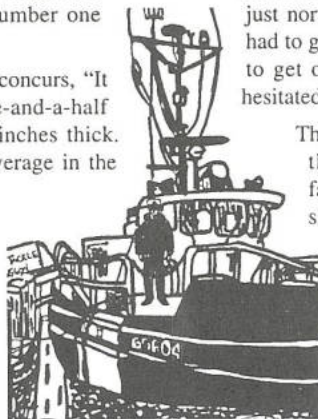
north to combat the ice at all. "If I turned, the pressure of the ice closing in behind us would have pinned us," he explains. "There was a couple of times we did go sideways, once just north of the Bay Bridge. I had to go full throttle in reverse to get out, and even then she hesitated."

This was not a maneuver that Chief Applegate favored, as the Tackle's stern is not reinforced and can't take as much pressure as the bow.

"At the Craig Hill Channel," he continues, "the ice was finally broke up enough so I could maneuver. We went on to Baltimore and laid in there for six days."

Other ships did not fare as well as the Tackle. The ice broke a hole in the grid cooler on the hull of the 65-foot cutter Capstan, putting her out of commission. The 65-foot Chalk was called out of Portsmouth to take her place. Even the 140-foot Morrow Bay out of Yorktown had problems with this year's unpredictable ice. The moving ice would frequently "ridge" or "raft", that is, one or more pieces would ride up over each other making a double or triple thickness of a single six to ten inch piece of ice.

When the Tackle reached Baltimore, R&R was still not a possibility for the exhausted crew. Because



Coast Guard Cutter Tackle

By Michelle Arnold

they had to remain in a High-Readiness status, they couldn't leave the ship except for short errands like laundry. The skipper and his crew, B.M.1 Rodney Fulcher, M.K.1 Randy Bradley, M.K.2 Rodney Walton, Seaman Chris Hurdle, and Seaman Ben Sellers, found the confinement tedious, even with a TV, VCR and Super-Nintendo aboard.

Tackle's 250 square feet of living space is divided into captain and crew sleeping quarters in the bow, and living quarters amidship. "These boats are set up for five day deployment, max, for six crew members," says Chief Applegate. "This time we were on board for almost ten days."

Besides ice cutting, the Tackle has been called to maritime emergencies such as boat fires and search and rescue missions. In 1988, the 190-foot motor vessel Frying Pan anchored off of Deal Island caught fire. A man was welding in the engine room and welding slag cut the fuel line. The Tackle arrived and shot foam and water down the stack into the engine room, halting the fire.

This past December, Chief Applegate was within minutes of getting underway to assist survivors from the sinking party boat El Toro at the mouth of the Potomac. To the crew's relief, the call came in that all personnel were accounted for. "My concern in that case," says Chief Applegate, "was for this boat. The 60 knot winds and six to ten foot seas that night exceeded the capabilities of the Tackle, which can operate safely in 50 knot winds and five-foot seas."

In the summer, Tackle's duties in law enforcement usually involve routine things like a tugboat operator with a VHF and no FCC license, workboats with discharged fire extinguishers, or intoxicated pleasure-boaters. Chief Applegate insists that drunken boat operators are far more dangerous than drunken car drivers, because of the distance usually required to reach the boat and the possibility of drowning.

With a good relationship with the Crisfield community, the Coast Guard Station has participated in the Soft Shell Fair, the Clam Bake and Crab Derby. At the request of last year's Crab Derby Committee, Chief Applegate invited the Coast Guard Honor Guard from Washington, D.C., to march in the 1993 parade.

The captain and crew of the Tackle will probably miss this year's Crab Derby, as the Tackle is slated to go up in the yard for 60 days at the end of the summer to have her original 37-year-old engine replaced.

After 20 years, most of which have been spent on the Bay, Chief Applegate is eligible to retire October 1 of this year. He may re-enlist, but the Coast Guard, like other agencies, is cutting back. "They are trying to reduce the country's force by 1500 enlisted men for all pay grades," says Chief Applegate, who has remained in the Coast Guard because it is a humanitarian institution. "Lives and property at sea is our business," he clarifies. "Prevention is as good as actual response."

Miss Ruth: The Teacher of Tangier

In the early 1900's, two sisters played together on the floor of their father's store, J.E. Wallace & Sons, on Tangier Island. Ruth would line up her dolls and "teach" them their lessons, or she would recruit her sister Blanche and other neighborhood children as her pupils. But with no high school on the Island, Ruth and Blanche could look forward to eight years of schooling and a comfortable life as Island wives.

For these two girls, however, life was to take a different turn. From the living room of her Tangier home, Miss Ruth remembers: "My sister Blanche and I were the first two girls to ever go to college from Tangier Island. Because there was no high school here, we had to make up our subjects at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia."

Majoring in Early Childhood Education, Ruth, a sixth generation descendant of Parson Joshua Thomas, returned to the only true island school

in the Virginia school system. "We used to be allowed to go to college for one year and then come back and teach," recalls Miss Ruth. "In the twenties, the Virginia Board of Education changed the rule so that you had to have, or be working on, a teacher's degree."

Miss Ruth taught second grade and ninth and tenth grade subjects such as World History, English and math. She remembers the vigilant inspection trips that the School Board made to Tangier in those days: "In the late twenties, Accomack County would send over supplies and materials on the Virginia State Boat. They didn't come often, maybe twice a year. Sometimes they'd drive to Crisfield to come over on the mail boat and spend the night. We had a supervisor, Miss Pusey, in the twenties and thirties. She was from Pocomoke, originally. She would test the children, and she always found our students to be very bright."

In her years of teaching on Tangier Island, Miss Ruth could usually look forward to a class of between 25 to 40 children, without the help of a teacher's aide. School was called off occasionally for high tides, but Tangier never had many make-up days at the end of the year.

Epidemic flus and colds didn't hit the Island often, because, as Miss Ruth remembers, "New diseases were rarely introduced. Dr. Gladstone birthed most of the children here from 1918 to 1958. He would inoculate the children if that were requested, but the school board didn't require it then."

Mainlanders did arrive at the Island, but it was usually to stay. Several teachers became faculty members at the school after marrying Tangiermen. Two of these whom Miss Ruth remembers are Mrs. Rudy Shores, formerly of Crisfield, and Mrs. Kenneth Pruitt, formerly of Marion Station.

A family with children arrived on Tangier after World War II. Miss Ruth recalls them today: "Many years gone by there was a family named Janders from New York. They moved here and educated their children in our school. She (Mrs. Ann Hugh Jander) wrote a biographical book of her days raising her family on Tangier. She died and her daughter brought me the manuscript of her book, *Crab's Hole*." On the table beside Miss Ruth's recliner sits the neatly-typed stack of papers, dated 1948.

In 1934, Miss Ruth married

Wallace Carmean of Virginia Beach. In 1958, they moved across the Bay where Wallace had a job as a Virginia Game Warden. Ruth Carmean quickly found work teaching in Virginia Beach. She thought it very novel to have a car, and drive back and forth to work, or to any number of other places on the mainland.

The large portion of Islanders who have been taught by Miss Ruth remember her well. Mrs. Burtie Parks, who brings Miss Ruth's mail and some of her meals, says, "My husband Edward 'Sonny' Parks had Miss Ruth. He said she was a great teacher. Everybody that had her said she was A-1."

Charles McCready, manager of Tangier Oil, says, "She was Mrs. Carmean when I had her for the eighth grade in 1959. She's one of the best teachers I ever had. When I left the Island in 1965, I didn't return until 1976. The first person I thought of when I came back was Mrs. Carmean."

Miss Ruth's students have followed a variety of professions. "I taught Mr. Wheatley, who was principal of Tangier School from 1949 to 1984," she recalls. "I taught Rick Parks, author of *Tangier Island*. He gave me his book and autographed it. Willie Crockett is a professor of dentistry at the Medical College of Virginia, and Edward Crockett is the former principal of Marion Elementary."

Native sons, Commissioner

William Pruitt of the Virginia Marine Resource Commission, and Accomack County Sheriff Robert Crockett are both graduates of Tangier School. And recent graduate Stephen Thomas is one of the youngest 100-ton licensed ship captains on the Bay, completing the difficult Coast Guard exam just after his eighteenth birthday.

Today, Mr. Wheatley's successor, Dennis Crockett, supervises 119 students in grades K-12, fifteen teachers, and six aides. Principal Crockett says the Virginia Marine Resource Commission boat Chesapeake still arrives out of Nanticoke twice a year to check up on the Tangier School. Their findings haven't changed much since the days of Miss Pusey. "Our reading scores are typically higher than the rest of Virginia," he says, adding that that's probably due to smaller class sizes.

Miss Ruth has established a scholarship for the valedictorian of the senior class, in memory of her daughter Patricia "Patsy Lee". The problem that school officials have is that the Tangier students all seem to finish within a tight range of GPAs, making

it difficult to choose the students with the highest performance, even to a tenth of a point.

Seven out of ten seniors in the Tangier class of '93 went on to college. Mr. Crockett estimates that only 20% of those who leave will ever return to Tangier.

In 1959, Wallace Carmean passed away. Seven years later, Miss Ruth married real estate broker Bob Clarke. Mr. Clarke died in 1972 and Miss Ruth subsequently retired from the school system.

But three years later, Miss Ruth was back as a tour guide for the Captain Thomas, renamed Chesapeake Breeze, out of Reedville. She also operated Cozy Corner Crafts for twelve years.

Even though Miss Ruth now spends her winters in Salisbury, she will always be an Island girl at heart. Speaking of her teaching days, she says, "Here, everyone knew me and it made things much simpler. It was the delight of my life to teach here on the Island. It is the most rewarding job, to be a teacher."

Smith Island: High School a boat ride away

Although Smith Island has always maintained elementary schools, the Island has never had a high school. The logistics of obtaining a high school degree were sometimes overwhelming for the Island children, even as late as 1973 when Allen Tyler began operating the Island School Boat, "Betty Jo Tyler".

Before that, Island families had to either board their teen-agers with mainland relatives, or in several of the homes that opened their doors to these young men and women striving to attain an education beyond the eighth grade. Because of the difficulties, Smith Islanders were at one time the only Marylanders allowed to leave school before the age of 16.

Many families even left the Island for the winter months, renting a home in Crisfield. Jackie Meeks remembers, "I graduated from Crisfield High in 1948. The state used to pay my parents \$13. a week to defray the cost of my coming over. That had to cover

room and board, living expenses, and the \$.50 fare we paid to travel back and forth twice a week. The first two years my parents moved over here so I could go to high school. Junior year I lived with my grandmother, Maggie Magee. Senior year my Daddy just didn't want to leave the Island. I stayed with Capt. Charleton Marshall and Miss Ethelyn Marshall, who was a school teacher. We paid Miss Ethelyn \$25. a week room and board."

While Captain Ullie Marshall would ferry the mail and students over from Rhodes Point, Captains Ben or Johnny Whitelock would take Jackie and the rest of the Tylerton and Ewell students across in the Island Belle every Monday morning.

"We were excused from our first class Monday," Jackie recalls. "We had to be in class by 10 a.m. We left on the noon boat on Friday, so we had to make up any work we missed Monday morning and Friday afternoon."

In 1944, when Jackie began her

In 1944, when Jackie began her freshman year, about ten students started with her from Tylerton. But due to the difficulties of attending Crisfield High, Jackie remembers, "At the time I graduated, I was the only one still going from Tylerton to class."

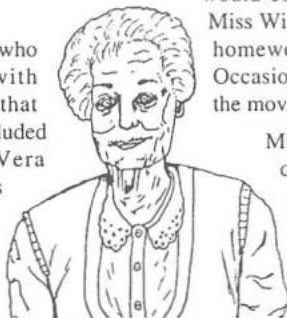
The group of students who left Rhodes Point with Captain Ullie Marshall that same fall day in 1944 included Vera Brimer (now Vera Townsend), her cousins Ralph and Bill Brimer, and Lois Whitelock. "It was scary at first," remembers Vera, whose experiences on the mainland had been limited until that time.

But Vera was fortunate to be the first of a long line of Smith Island students who were placed with Miss Winnie Evans, a native Smith Islander from Ewell, who had moved to Crisfield in her younger years. Miss Winnie, her husband Nicholas, and their children Eileen and Nicholas, Jr., opened their Myrtle Avenue home to the Smith Island students.

"I just love people," says Miss Winnie from her comfortable living room. "All of the children who came here were always good children. I'd keep between one and three at a time. I'd cook breakfast for them. They'd walk home for lunch, and we'd have dinner around six. Then they'd sit in the dining room or in their rooms and do homework. If they had an activity

or the weather was too bad, they'd stay the weekend and attend services with us at Immanuel Methodist."

Vera agrees, "Miss Winnie's father, Mr. Noah Evans, would come over and sometimes a whole crowd would come in and sit around Miss Winnie's table and do our homework and pop popcorn. Occasionally we would go to the movies at the Arcade."



"Miss Winnie"

By Shannon Heath

Miss Winnie, who sees a difference in today's children, thinks that part of our problem now is working mothers. "In those days," she says, "Most of the mothers

stayed home and worked with their children. The children knew what was expected when they came to my home."

Her sister, Estelle Bradshaw, agrees. "They lived just like they did at home. They knew by my sister's manner of living that they should behave."

"At night they'd be in by ten if they stayed the weekend, and I always knew where they were," adds Miss Winnie. "On week nights, they were home studying. They all picked up their rooms and I never had a problem with any of them."

All of Miss Winnie's "children" have done well. Vera, a former Somerset County School Board member, now works in the Personnel

Department at McCready Hospital. Harvey "Junie" Spriggs lives in Annapolis and works in the State Comptroller's office as the number one non-elected official under Louis Goldstein. His brother, John "Sonny" Spriggs graduated from Johns Hopkins University and served as a marine in Vietnam. He is now an engineer in Pennsylvania. Jeanette Tyler Micula, recently deceased, was a school librarian in Baltimore County for 30 years. Adelaide Tyler Marshall lives in Tylerton and plays piano for the Tylerton United Methodist Episcopal Church. Rose Tyler Evans works with her husband, Eugene, at their business, Evans Boat Construction and Repair. Karen Evans Marshall, Vera's daughter, lives in Heart's Ease. She is presently a schoolteacher and has been principal of both Smith Island schools. Darin Evans works the water at Smith Island, and Carol Ann Evans Kiser is a teacher in Salisbury. Dwight "Duke" Marshall Jr. is the Nationwide Insurance Agent here in Crisfield.

Miss Winnie's son, Nicholas Evans Jr., is an accountant in Salisbury, while her daughter, Eillen, is deceased.

Former Crisfield High School principal and former Supervisor of School Transportation, Bill Dykes, remembers when the county contracted to have the Smith Island school boat, Betty Jo Tyler, carry the students in 1973.

"Dr. Morris Rannel, State Supervisor of Transportation, took a keen interest in this issue and helped us. It really was a fantastic thing. The boat has been a savings to the state and at the same time it helped keep families together."

Even though the school boat Betty Jo Tyler seemed to end the need for boarding homes such as Miss Winnie's, the school called her once again in 1982. A young student from Smith Island had to stay on the mainland to attend after-school practices with the Crisfield High basketball team and the school hoped that Miss Winnie would be kind enough to take him in.

"I wouldn't have missed that for anything," says Miss Winnie of her last boarding student, Henry Guy Jr., who became the first Naval Academy graduate from Smith Island. Miss Winnie remembers Henry's graduation night: "Mr. and Mrs. Henry Guy Sr. were spending the night with us because it was Henry Jr.'s graduation," says Miss Winnie. "The call came through from the Naval Academy confirming Henry's appointment."

Today, at 86, Miss Winnie still keeps in touch with her former boarders. "I enjoyed every one of them," she smiles. "I loved them. It has paid off well and I call them all 'my children'".

Handy's:

Soft Shell Crab

Last April 24, Harvey Linton Sr. (Linton Seafood) said he heard that a crab was spotted up the Annessex, and no less than 15 boats were seen bearing down on him. That jimmy's fate was sealed when David Laird scraped him up, but his brother, who stayed buried that day, managed to shed once before Duane Labo scraped him up and hauled him to the Handy's Soft Shell Crab floats.

After nearly escaping twice down the drain, while Gail Marshall was cleaning floats, he finally shed again and ended up in the sizing room where Sara Gerald plopped him in a mold and doomed him as a jumbo.

After this undignified treatment, Jennie Dise got a hold of him and 17 of his kinfolk and cut them in one minute flat.

They weren't done with him. Barbara Anne Applegate wrapped him in about five seconds and he was off to be frozen and shipped.

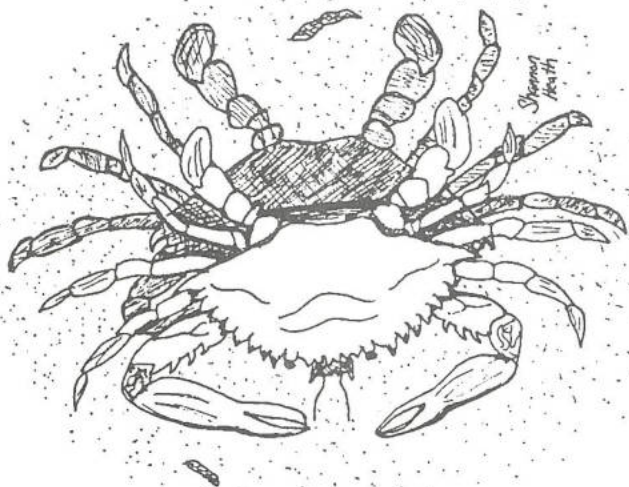
We lost track of him after that. He had an 80% chance of staying right

here in the U.S., but he could have headed to soft crab lovers in Japan, Mexico, England, Spain, France, or any number of European countries. So goes the fate of millions of soft crabs that go through the Handy facility every year.

Others end up under the scrutiny of Harrison "Jabo" Lake in the Live Pack room. Here the crabs that will be shipped live are carefully selected. According to Director of Operations, Phil Winchester, "We don't say 'Handy's' 'til Jabo says we say 'Handy's'"

With fifty years clocked in at Handy's, Jabo has seen a lot of changes: "Old man John Handy II had a year-round operation business in green and ripe tomatoes, oysters, fish and soft crabs. He had a tomato canning facility, too."

Mary Francis (Adams) Kyte remembers picking tomatoes for the cannery with her brother Charlie Adams, her father Upshur, her mother Alta, and five other children, "We picked tomatoes and strawberries at John T. Handy's farm on Old State



A soft shell crab emerges from its "shed"

By Shannon Heath

Road. Our father used to plow this land with horses."

Mr. Kenneth "Goldy" Goldsborough, 72, has worked at Handy's since he was 13. Standing at the front of a large conveyor belt that carries crabs to the cutters and wrappers, he remembers, "You used to cut 'em out the pan and pass the pan on to be wrapped. Now conveyor belts make it a lot faster."

On down the conveyor belt from Goldy, Denise Milbourne wraps crabs. "I've worked here for five summers. I work at Shore Up in the winter."

"Our people are good people," says Phil Winchester. "seventy-five per cent of our people return every year. A lot have been here twenty or thirty years."

Founded in 1894, Handy's began specializing in soft crabs in 1917. Marvis Bishop, who's worked at Handy's for 52 years, since she was 13, agrees with Goldy about the new technology that Handy's has adopted in the last century. "I've seen a big improvement in the machinery. Everything used to be done by hand. Conveyor belts, freezing machines and grading machines make the work go a lot faster now."

Today the soft shell industry employs a large percentage of Crisfield's work force in any given summer. This does not include the marketing opportunities provided to the numerous watermen who sell their crabs to these facilities. Crisfield still leads the world in soft shell processing today.

One brand new innovation in the industry is the nitrogen tray pack method. This method, which replaces hand-wrapping, places crabs individually in trays with cavities sized to accommodate mediums, hotels, primes, jumbos and whales (over five and a half inches). Liquid nitrogen is used to freeze these crab-filled trays in twelve minutes. "We're going to phase out hand-wrap in favor of tray pack," says Phil. "But," he reassures, "We will always hand-wrap for our customers upon request."

Out in the yard, Mike Rowe of inventory control pulls in with a forklift full of supplies. "I control about one-third of a million dollars worth of packaging a month," says Mike. "There's no two days alike. The freezers have to be kept clear, there has to be enough supplies to keep production going, and company trucks have to be routed in and out of five warehouses," says Mike. He adds that 2500 pounds of crab meat is arriving that day.

Over in shanty A-12, Bruce T. Champion, Sr., maintenance assistant, checks out the lights over "Bobo" Albert Merritt's floats.

"The main problems I deal with," says Bruce, "Are floats clogging up, electrical problems, and machinery maintenance inside. There are ninety shanties at Handy's, alone."

Bobo looks pleased with his day's catch. "It's been a right good shedding season," he affirms.

Back in the office Bobo's wife, Cindy, every crabber's favorite secretary, writes up the crabbers' checks. President Carol Haltman agrees with Bobo that "This has been the best soft shell season so far."

There's a lot going on at a soft shell processing plant like Handy's that can't be seen anywhere else in the country. Tours may be arranged for groups who call several weeks in advance for an appointment.

Homer's Odyssey: Carrier Pigeons of Somerset

Archangels, Ice Pigeons, Fantails, Tumblers, Tipplers, and Oriental Sharpshooters.

Their common cousins line cathedral rooftops from Venice to New York, like seagulls line the piers and barges around Crisfield. At \$20 to \$1,000 apiece, their colors range from rust to white to blue-gray. They can be turned loose 1,000 miles from home and find their loft by the angle of the sun's rays.

Pigeons have been bred and raced in China, Europe and America for centuries. Today they are divided into three groups: Fancy, including form, tumblers and tipplers, carrier or racing, and squabbing or eating pigeons.

Carrier pigeons were a natural form of communication in an island/peninsula area like ours, especially before the invention of the telephone. Even today, Lower Eastern Shoremen find pigeon-keeping to be an interesting diversion.

Although several pigeon fanciers in Crisfield have lofts of up to 40 birds, others maintain lofts of two to six, name their pigeons, bathe them once a week, and paint runways for them. In other words, it's strictly for fun.

Carl and Amber, a cock and hen pair belonging to Tommy and Charlene Linton, have displayed a lot of admirable parenting skills: "These pigeons mate for life," says Tommy. "The male shares the nesting job by sitting on the nest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. The hen has to do the nesting job the rest of the time."

Carl's job isn't finished after the eggs hatch. When the young squabs are two to three weeks old, and Amber is ready to start another nest, Carl will continue feeding his "squeekers" until they are six weeks old.

Tommy and Charlene Linton like all birds, and have a canary and parrot inside their home. The pigeons, how-

ever, draw them outside every morning when Charlene lets them loose for a morning flight. "It's nice to watch them swoop and dive and tumble," she says. "After about an hour, they go back to their coop to eat."

"On mornings that I'm going to race them, I just put them in their carrier and don't feed them," adds Tommy, who has the fastest pigeons in Crisfield, according to the informal races he has with his friends. In the one "official" race he entered in August, Carl and Amber flew from Westover to Sackertown Road in one hour, beating three other contenders. "Next time, we'll race from Princess Anne. We keep moving farther away," he explains.

Tommy and Charlene's coop has an unusual feature. He's built a runway with red lines and arrows on it to assist Carl and Amber in locating their coop from the air.

When Rudy Thomas Jr. isn't captaining the mail boat Tangier Island, he, too, spends time with his pigeons. The first two he brought to his home on Tangier Island were too old and flew away. The ideal pigeon is a



Tommy Linton holding "Carl"

By Shannon Heath

young squab who's never left and returned to a coop. This type of bird bonds better to its owner.

"The two pigeons I have now are young," says Rudy. "They were only three weeks old when we got them. With these pigeons, we left the roof off (the flight area). I think they get their bearings from the stars, too. It had to be like that, because when we kept them with

the roof on, they left and never came back."

Postal worker Bob Torre, who owns four adult pigeons and two squabs, has found that his hens will lay one egg, and then another two days later. One hatchling is a male, and one a female. He says that the birds are easy to feed, but are often prey for raccoons or hawks. One of his was attacked in the air, and he found the remains.

Bob has not had the racing success that Tommy has. "Tommy and I had a race from Westover the other day. His got home in an hour, but mine were well-fed and they didn't come home for over three hours," he says, adding that that's the same amount of time it took them to fly home from Delaware.

At least Bob's pigeons, Turbo, Mr. Bill and White Lightning, did return. Carl "Ty" Tyler tried his luck with pigeons and became discouraged. His pigeon Homer just seemed to want to ride boats instead of fly. "I sent Homer over to Smith Island on the boat," he recalls. "He didn't come back 'til Terry Laird, captain of Jason II, brought him back. He was gone near about a week."

Bob adds, "Homer visited all the islands. People fed him. Finally, the Smith Islanders sent him back on Jason II."

Ty then took Homer to Kingston to see if he'd fly home from there, but he

returned once again to the dock downtown. Everyone thought that he was Captain Terry Laird's pigeon, so they sent him back to Smith Island. Finally, Terry called Ty and said that they thought they had Homer again. So, they sent him back to Crisfield on Jason II again.

Bob thinks that Homer is one smart pigeon: "Why should a pigeon fly, when it can always come home on the mail boat?"

Ty is less optimistic. "I'm out of the pigeon business," he frowns. "They're just too darn much trouble."

Elmer Riggin: *Boat Carver*

In models and photographs, the fleet of Elmer Riggin stands ready to sail. Leprechaun-sized cabin doors open. Slides on cabin tops slide, steering wheels turn, and rudders move. The nylon twine rigging and canvas sails work, and the yawl boats can be raised and lowered. Even the propellers spin.

"Skipjacks, tugboats, schooners, bugeyes, yachts, racing canoes, roundsterns, boxsterns - you name it. If she came into Crisfield on the water, I'd carve her," says Elmer Riggin of his creations. "I advertise my boats as 'authentic', so everything has to work."

And everything is hand-carved, from the cross-rigging, to the cleats, to the tiny working blocks painted silver. "I don't buy anything made," says Elmer. "I buy the wood, and that's all." Rich shades of contrasting pieces of varnished bass, cedar, cypress, oak, black walnut, mahogany, cherry and pine can all be found on Elmer's finished pieces. His nephew Cranston Dize brings the wood to him from Baltimore.

His sister-in-law, Amanda Riggin, crochets his drudge bags for the skipjacks, and his close neighbor, Carolyn Ragan, makes his sails. "My wife Carrie used to make the sails. I'd hand her the paper patterns and in about ten minutes she'd have the sails ready for me to rig. She died twelve years ago this October."

Although Elmer was a crew member on most of the types of boats he carves, he claims that his interest in the sea developed when he was a baby: "My grandfather was a waterman and my mother and grandmother were sail-makers. They went to his boat to fix the sails one day, and they laid me on the washboard. Somehow I fell overboard. My grandfather fished me up with a dipnet. So, I was baptized and christened all on the same day, and that's why I'm a waterman!"

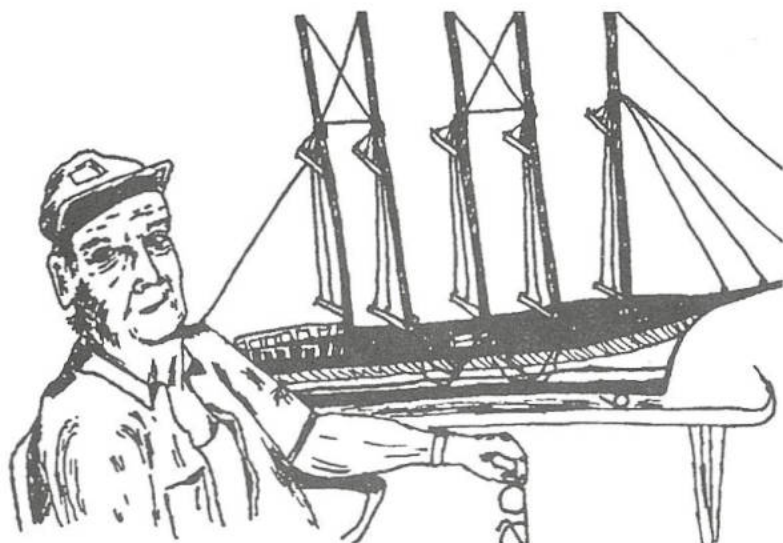
When he was eight, in 1909, Elmer went to work on John Sterling's crab boat for \$.25 a week. He spent one week's wages on a Barlow knife and began to carve small sailboats for toys. He had his own boat when he was 14, and when he was 18, he got his first job on the skipjack Howard.

After that, he crewed or cooked on the C.W. Crockett, Sidney Riggin, Woodrow, and the Leonora, among other boats. He was married to Carrie in 1920, and shortly afterward, he sold his first model boat for \$35. to one J. Millard Tawes - before that gentleman became the governor of Maryland.

Of his neighbors, Lem and Steve Ward, Elmer remembers, "We were born and raised together. We'd go fishing and gunning together. We all started making 'coy ducks because nobody had a cent before World War I. Lem was an artist. He'd paint his (decoys) to look like the feathers was flapping. He'd get \$5. for a gunning decoy and I couldn't get a cent. Finally, he got \$2500. for two pintails, and I couldn't get \$35. for mine because he could paint, and I couldn't."

Later, Elmer and "two famous Crisfielders" went gunning together in February of 1942. "The game warden came up on us and I had two ducks. I buried mine in the mud and stood on them with my hip boots, but we got fined anyway. My fine was \$51.85," Elmer recalls ruefully.

Although Elmer's best customer has come from the Western Shore to buy over a hundred boats in the last 20 years, Elmer Riggin boats can be seen in many stores in Salisbury and Baltimore. Elmer carved a working replica of Reverend Robert Daniel's Stanley Norman, which was presented to the "Crabbing Preacher" by his parishioners on Pastor Appreciation Sunday. One four-masted schooner took eleven months to build. "If it weren't for carving, I'd be gone a long time ago," says Elmer. "I'm prepared



Elmer Riggin

By Shannon Heath

and I don't worry. When I lay down I don't ever expect to get up in the morning. I'm packed and waiting for that ship to carry me over." Elmer attends Reverend Daniel's Wesleyan Church.

At 92, there are still things that Elmer would like to do: "I'd like to build a square-rigger. I can build the boat, but I haven't figured out how to rig the sails properly. I've seen 'em going up the Bay, but I've never been

aboard one to see the rigging up close. I can rig one so that it would look OK, but the rigging wouldn't work."

Today Elmer Riggin is busy completing a five-masted schooner he calls On My Way. Nearby sits a well-loved and well-worn model boat hull that his nephew Cranston just returned after four decades of sailing down Baltimore gutters. Elmer plans to refurbish her in case some more boys need to play with her.

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