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Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race 2024

September 28, 2024 @ 9:00 am - 11:00 am

One hundred years ago, skipjacks competed in races up and down the Chesapeake Bay. Today, only two skipjack races remain. The Labor Day race and carnival at Deal Island is now in its 65th year and the 28th Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race will be held September 28 in Cambridge.

The Official State Boat of Maryland, Skipjacks were designed to efficiently harvest oysters in the shallow waters of the Chesapeake Bay. In 1900, the Skipjack fleet counted over 1,000 boats working the Bay. As motorized workboats became available, the number of sailing oyster dredgers declined. In 1957, there were only 80 skipjacks still dredging the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. By 1985, when the Skipjack was officially designated the State Boat of Maryland, fewer than 30 licensed and working Skipjacks sailed the Bay. Today, six to 10 Skipjacks still dredge oysters commercially. Another 20 or so are being preserved and sailed by maritime museums, non-profit groups and dedicated individuals. The days of sail powered commercial oyster dredging are quickly fading from memory.

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Skipjack races and several ports around the Bay hosted races. But as the number of boats declined, many races faded away until just two remained. The race at Deal Island in Somerset County is held every Labor Day as part of the annual Skipjack Festival. The race is run out in Tangier Bay and is best seen from a boat.

The 28th Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race, held September 28 in Cambridge, is one of the premier showcases for the Chesapeake Skipjack Fleet. In recent years, the race has been an exciting start to oyster season, as well as a major tourist event. It has gained a reputation as “the” place for photographers to view and shoot this historic fleet. The race is sponsored by the Dorchester Skipjack Committee and the host, Skipjack *Nathan of Dorchester*. This race starts and finishes by the Choptank River Lighthouse and offers spectators an excellent view of the race, especially from the floating dock at Long Wharf Park, at the foot of High and Water streets in Cambridge.

Competing boats will sail to Cambridge on Friday, September 27, where they will dock at Long Wharf and along the County Bulkhead by the County Office Building. Then, Saturday, September 28 begins with a Captains' Meeting at 8 a.m., followed by a parade of boats out of the harbor at 9 a.m. The Skipjack Race will begin at 10 a.m. and is usually finished by noon. It is followed by a lunch and awards ceremony for the captains and crew. After the race, some boats return to their home base, but several stay over until Sunday or Monday in Cambridge. There are events in town Sunday, featuring the Dorchester Showcase, a craft fair that draw over 1,000 visitors and would be entertaining for anyone. Additionally, some boats may set up charter sails for Saturday evening or Sunday.

At these races, the Skipjacks sail for Pride, not Prizes. The winner is awarded an engraved pewter trophy. All boats that cross the starting line in Cambridge receive a “show-up” fee of \$1,000, mostly used by the captains for boat maintenance and preservation. All boats that cross the finish line receive a “Captain’s Bonus” that varies in amount each year, based on the Race Committee’s fundraising.

The purpose of the Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race is to help preserve the remaining Skipjacks. This is done by both giving the Skipjacks needed maintenance funds and also by showcasing these historic boats to the public along the Choptank River. Over the past 28-plus years, the Dorchester Skipjack Committee has raised and donated over \$100,000 to help preserve the Skipjack fleet.

The oldest Skipjack in the fleet is the *Rebecca T Ruark*, built in 1885 and just recently was refurbished; she does dredge commercially still. Another key boat expected in this year’s race is the Skipjack *Wilma Lee*, a boat refurbished and preserved at the Annapolis Maritime Museum. And of course, the Skipjack *Nathan of Dorchester* will participate, fresh from celebrating her 30th anniversary this summer. Another five to seven skipjacks will venture to Cambridge to take part in this historic maritime heritage event.

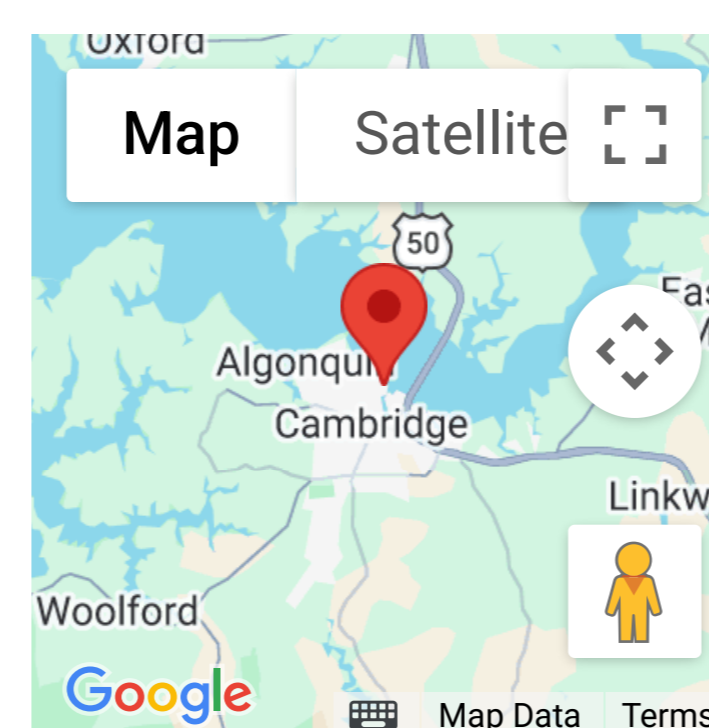
Everyone is welcome to come to Long Wharf in Cambridge on Saturday, September 28 from about 8:45 a.m. to noon to see the last remaining fleet of sailing fishing boats, as they sail past in parade and race up and down the beautiful Choptank River. For more information about the Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race, visit skipjack-nathan.org.

DETAILS

Date:
[September 28, 2024](#)
Time:
9:00 am - 11:00 am

VENUE

Long Wharf Park
High and Water streets
Cambridge, MD 21613
United States + [Google Map](#)



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