

The Broadside

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The voice of The Mathews Maritime Foundation

Museum Located at 482 Main Street, Mathews, VA Mail to PO Box 1201, Mathews, VA 23109
804-725-4444 on the web at www.mathewsmaritime.com

Larry Chowning Lecture...

On Thursday night, October 22nd, 7PM, at the Mathews Maritime Museum, 482 Main Street, Mathews, noted local author Larry Chowning will be hosting a book discussion featuring his soon-to-be released book "Chesapeake Bay Folklife". It is "a historical account of waterman traditions, maritime culture and folk crafts." His new book has over 180 photos and the program will feature some of those photos, one of which is shown below.



Emma and her son Cornell Williams made corn husk mops in 1980s at their home on Corbin Hall farm in Middlesex County. Mops were sold to commercial fishermen to scrub down their boats. This is one of 180 photos in the book Chesapeake Bay Folklife.

Chowning was born and raised in Middlesex County and educated in the public schools. He studied journalism at the University of Richmond where he graduated in 1972. He has been a general assignment reporter for the

Southside Sentinel newspaper in Urbanna since 1981 and a regular contributor and Field Editor for National Fisherman (NF) out of Rockland Maine since 1980. NF is the largest seafood trade publication in the United States.

His work with NF has taken him from one end of Chesapeake Bay to the other and many photos in Chesapeake Bay Folklife were taken in the 1980s and 90s during assignments for NF.

Much of his work has focused on boats, people and maritime life on the Bay. This paragraph from the acknowledgment in Chesapeake Bay Folklife speaks to where his early understanding of bay folklike came from.

"Every Sunday, we would go after church to Grandma and Granddaddy's house (in Locust Hill) for lunch. It was a big family as my mother was one of eight children. My grandfather was a traditional oystermen/farmer - lived and worked the same lifestyle as his father had and his father before him. Granddaddy had grown up oystering on sail-powered log boats and was glad when internal combustion engines in boats came along. He was a small man but could "solid" work a pair of tongs and he did so into his 80s. One of the most proficient groups of watermen in Virginia are those from Guinea Neck in Gloucester County. Once, I mentioned my grandfather's name (Raymond Blake) to Hennion Brown of Guinea and he spoke right up, "Yeah, I remember him. A little man who could solid tong oysters." My grandmother was quiet and reserved

but could snap beans faster than any professional and made the best homemade "cow" butter in the world. I thank grandma and granddaddy for introducing me as a child to the diversity of the bay's folklife."

Chowning and his wife Dee live in Urbana in the home that his great-grandfather, a Civil War veteran, built on returning home from war. Chownings have lived on the Middle Peninsula since 1649. Dee and Larry have three children and six-grandchildren.

Other books by Chowning include: "Soldiers at the Doorstep", "Chesapeake Legacy: Tools and Traditions", "Chesapeake Bay Buyboats", "Deadrise and Cross-planked", and "Barcat Skipper: Tales of a Tangier Island Waterman" to name a few.

Mathews County's Maritime Heritage...

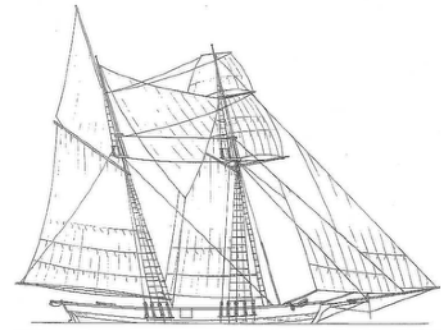
The maritime heritage of Mathews, as many of you may know, is rich and quite extensive. From the Revolutionary War through the War of 1812 Mathews was one of the premier shipbuilding areas of the East Coast.

In this and subsequent issues of The Broadside we will present highlights of that heritage through articles on the Mathews ships and the men who built them. We'll start with the *Experiment*, the ship of the Foundation's logo.

"Experiment"...

At its formation in 1999, the Mathews Maritime Foundation was given permission by Peter J. Wrike, maritime historian, to use this drawing (at right) as its logo. This ship was chosen as representative of the vast maritime history that is Mathews County. She is typical of the pilot schooners that were developed by early ship builders to meet the need for fast vessels to move perishable cargo from port to port in the shortest time. In building these types of fast ships for their commerce, merchants sacrificed cargo carrying capacity. She was built by Armistead Davis in 1808 at his yard on the East River,

Mathews County, Virginia. The East River, a tributary of Mobjack Bay, in the heart of tidewater Virginia, was one of the major shipbuilding



The Baltimore Pilot

areas of the Chesapeake Bay.

There were more than a dozen shipwrights in Mathews building schooners and ships for the merchants of Baltimore between 1790 and the War of 1812. They included members of the Davis family, the Gayles, and the Smith family.

"Mathews County, and particularly the Port of East River, had a reputation for fast, reliable vessels typically referred to as "sharp-built." During the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, this type of vessel was designed for blockade running. Armistead Davis's builder's certificate and her U. S. Government Register documents in Baltimore survive. She was 80 feet on her main deck with a beam of 23 feet, her hold was 9 feet deep with a draft of 11 feet. Her displacement was 120 tons empty, and 154 when ready for sea, exclusive of cargo.

In 1812, while delivering a Russian cargo to Karlskrona, Sweden, the EXPERIMENT's fine lines, construction, and reputation for speed caught the attention of Swedish Admiral Puke. The Swedish Navy purchased the EXPERIMENT in 1813. Her "lines" were taken off and used to construct four Swedish Navy schooners, all launched in 1815 - Falk, Puke, L'Aigle, and Activ. Each was armed with 2 long four pound carriage guns and 6 twelve pound carronades.

They were used for dispatch duties, in-shore patrol, and reconnaissance. They all had successful careers. The EXPERIMENT survived in Swedish naval service until she was broken up in 1859.” (Peter J. Wrike)

Peggy Sunday Cruises...

The Mathews Maritime Foundation has prepared a schedule of dates on which Foundation members can enjoy a Sunday afternoon cruise on the deck boat “Peggy of New Point”.

Cruises are scheduled for October 11th, 18th and 25th, and November 1st and 8th.

Cruises will take place on the scheduled Sunday afternoons, weather permitting. Peggy will depart the dock at our Gwynn’s Island Boat Shop at one o’clock and return around 4:30

Please note that we are, at present, limited to six (6) people per cruise and you must be a MEMBER of the Foundation in order to participate. Not a member, go to www.mathewsmaritime.com and join.

Registration is first come first served and limited to one trip per season so that as many members as possible can be accommodated.

To reserve your space go to https://www.mathewsmaritime.com/peggycruises_2026.html follow the instructions for completing your reservation.

What is a “Bugeye”?

A recent survey of random passersby, with the question, “What is a bugeye?” mostly resulted in blank, bug-eyed stares and references to British sports coupes. But most inhabitants of this part of the world would know a bugeye-sailing vessel if they saw one. In fact, a local Gloucester car dealer displays the iconic form in their logo. Long, low and not too lean, typically with three triangular sails on raking masts, these boats just look right. And they even come

with a mysterious name that no one for sure knows the source of.

The triangular three-sail plan on steeply raking masts is a striking characteristic of bugeyes. Interestingly, bugeyes use nomenclature from schooner-rigged vessels. Looking at the boats in profile, you can see the aft mast is shorter than the forward mast, so is it a “ketch-rig”? No, bugeyes use schooner terminology, the forward-mast is the “Foremast”, and the aft-mast is the “Mainmast”, as opposed to the ketch terminology of “Mainmast” being the taller, forward mast and “Mizzenmast” being the shorter, aft-mast. You can say of a bugeye, the “Mizzen” is “missin”.

Bugeyes first appeared in the records after the Civil War, apparently evolving from log canoes when the oyster grounds were opened up to the use of dredges. Log canoes didn’t have enough sail power to pull dredges, so the type was gradually enlarged to 50 or more feet in length, decked over, given a small cabin and rigged with the three-sail plan. A few were given gaff rigs and were known as “square sail bugeyes”. During the off-season, bugeyes found employment carrying freight up and down the Bay and the surrounding coastal waters. They had centerboards for lateral resistance and their resulting shallow drafts allowed them access to load products from isolated wharfs. In the last years of the type’s evolution, the boats generally moved to plank-on-frame construction, but retained the chopped-log proportions.



Edna E Lockwood

Records indicate a bias towards the northern Bay in regards to numbers built. Even so, over thirty bugeyes were registered by Virginia builders in the time period from the end of the Civil War to 1918. Since not all boats built were registered, it's likely more than that number were actually constructed. In Mathews County, at least three bugeyes were recorded as built at Hick's Wharf, Leonora, Centre Fire, and L. W. Machen, with White Wing built at New Point, Edward and Lesta at Port Haywood, and Harvest Home at Laban. Bugeyes had hard lives and were simply used up and left to the elements when their working days were through. Notable existing bugeyes include the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's Edna E Lockwood and Jim Richardson's Jenny Norman, which is currently sailing as a tourist boat in Key West.



The big mystery with “bugeyes” centers around where their name comes from. Some say the hawse pipes and bowsprit gives the appearance of a bug's face. Then there's the idea that the Scottish slang for oysters, “buckies” morphed into “bugeyes”. It does sound like “buckeye” but what's the connection? In the book “Chesapeake Bay Bugeyes”, published in 1941, M. V. Brewington suggests the possibility that “the name may

be a corruption of an African dialectic term for a boat”. A recent William and Mary master's thesis published by David Moran pointed to a reference from a 1967 book by P. D. Curtin that, in the late 18th century, there was a west African region known as “Boughiye” renowned for its production of top-shelf log canoes. It's hard to look at “Boughiye” and not see “Bugeye”. It will likely never be conclusively determined where the name came from, so pick a story and go with it, there's nobody who can say you're wrong.

Come and see the new Bugeye model and other models representing Mathews maritime heritage at the Mathews Maritime Museum. If you have bugeye tales or artifacts to share, please contact the museum at 804 725 4444.

Peggy of New Point Prints...

We still have a number of the limited edition prints of the John Barber painting of “Peggy of New Point”, celebrating her 100 years - 1925-2025. They are available at \$76.50 each for Foundation members and \$85.00 for non-members. Call Pete Hall at 434.917.5281 to order.



Museum Hours ...

The museum is open on Fridays and Saturdays from 10AM to 2 PM May-November.

Visits at other times can be arranged by calling Dennis Crawford at 804-366-5337.