

MENHADEN

FISH FACTORY

TAFT BEACH - WHITESTONE, VIRGINIA

1930's



July, 1988

MENHADEN FISHING ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY IN THE 1930'S

The following was compiled and written by:

Willoughby W. Colonna, Jr.
Present President, Colonna's Shipyard, Inc.

Benjamin O. Colonna, Jr.
Past President, Colonna's Shipyard, Inc.

Nicholas W. Paxson
Past Vice-President, Colonna's Shipyard, Inc.

All of whom readily admit that they are not historians or writers and make no guarantees as to the absolute accuracy of detail in this written history or in the series of seven paintings that accompany this document.

However, they do admit to a strong interest in the people and the events that brought about the evolution of this industry from very small individual endeavors to very large, well financed and organized, highly productive enterprises. They have, therefore, based this history on knowledge gained from many years of personal involvement with various facets of the menhaden industry such as factory operation, fishing vessel operation and the repair and outfitting of the fishing vessel at the shipyard; also information stored in the shipyard archives concerning our ancestor's participation in these related businesses. One very considerable segment of information came about thru the many years of business and personal friendships with a great number of the people who made the Menhaden Fishing Industry what it is today.

CONTENTS

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>PAGES</u>
INTRODUCTION	1 - 2
THE FACTORY PROCESS	3 - 4
THE FISH BOATS	5
HOW THE FISH WERE CAUGHT	6 - 10
THE PURSE NET	11 - 12
THE "COMPANY" STORE	13 - 15
"POTOMAC" PILOT HOUSE	16 - 18
BEN JR. REMEMBERS	19 - 30
BILL JR. REMEMBERS	31 - 37

NOTE: This text to be accompanied by seven paintings
of vessels and factory, done by Casey Holtzinger.

MENHADEN FISHING ON THE CHESAPEAKE BAY IN THE 1930'S

The following pictures with the accompanying explanatory text is an attempt to preserve some of the comparatively little known facts concerning an industry which flourished in the first half of this Century on the U. S. East Coast and had a momentous effect on the lives of people on the Chesapeake Bay in general and the area of the Rappahannock River in particular.

This work is also meant to be specifically a history of one full facility Menhaden Fish Factory its people and its fleet of fishing vessels. This was the Taft Beach Factory, near Whitestone, Virginia, owned by B. O. Colonna, Sr., and W. W. Colonna, Sr. of Berkley, Norfolk, Virginia from 1932 to 1939.

Taft Beach was a rather low lying strip of sand facing the river's entrance on the north side of the Rappahannock River, about 9-3/4 miles up-river from Windmill Point at the entrance to the river. In the days of operation of this factory, those watching for the evening return of the fishing fleet would look East to the river's mouth in an attempt to be the first one to spot the smoke of these coal burning steam powered vessels.

We do not know whether or not there was an operation at Taft Beach prior to 1912; but we do know that in that year a factory was built by H. R. Humphreys, Sr. for Dr. B. H. B. Hubbard, Jr. and Wilbur James who called their operation Taft Fish Company. We know little of what occurred at this factory from that time until 1932 when the Colonna Brothers bought it from Dr. B. H. B. Hubbard Jr., Colin Chilton and Walter Mercer, all of Whitestone, Virginia, and operated it under the name Menhaden Products, Inc. Walter Mercer remained as General Manager from that time until 1939 when the Colonna Brothers sold the factory to J. Howard Smith, Sr., of Port Monmouth, New Jersey, who operated it for one year (1940) and then closed down the complete operation at this location. This plant was never again operated as a fish factory.

Special thanks is extended to Benjamin O. Colonna, Jr. for his help in putting this work together. Many of the facts contained herein were gleaned from his remembrance of youthful activities related to his father's involvement in the operation of this fish factory.

TAFT BEACH MENHADEN FISH FACTORY - WHITESTONE, VA.

The loaded fishing vessels came into the factory area and tied up portside to the elevator pier. The machinery of the elevator pier was powered by small steam engines, as in fact the entire factory was steam powered at the time (circa 1935). The operator of the elevator pier then lowered a bucket type chain conveyor into the fish hold of the vessel. The fish hold gang then pushed fish into the conveyor buckets using pitchforks. The chain elevator buckets transferred the fish to another chain conveyor with wood paddles which transferred them to a collection box called the raw box. Each dump cycle of the counting box registered on a meter and in this manner the vessel's catch was determined. Traditionally Menhaden catches were sized in units of 1,000 fish. Fishing vessels were also sized according to this standard of how many thousand fish they could carry in their fish hold. As the fish accumulated in the raw box, they were dumped on a conveyor which transported them to the cooker. The cooker was made up of a screw conveyor housed in a steel pipe about 15" - 16" in diameter. Steam was injected into the pipe at approximately 12" intervals for a distance of about 30 feet. As the screw moved the raw fish through the pipe, they were cooked by the injected steam and as they emerged from the cooker were fed into a press which pressed the oil and water from the fish solids. These solid particles made up of the bones and flesh of

the cooked fish were transported by chain conveyor with wooden paddles to the dryer. After drying, these solids were bagged and became known as fish meal. In instances where the fish meal was improperly cooled and dried, it would ignite spontaneously and sometimes cause factories to burn down. After suitable cooling, it was stored to await shipment to fertilizer plants and factories that processed mill feed for agricultural animals. The oil and water mixture which was generated in the pressing process was piped to 6 square, open topped, wooden tanks approximately 8 feet by 12 feet by 8 feet deep. The mixture flowed from tank to tank progressively and the oil and water separated by gravity so that the last tanks were mostly oil and the first tanks mostly water, the oil being cooked in the last 3 or 4 tanks to reduce the acid content and evaporate any remaining water. The oil was pumped from these separation tanks to outside steel storage tanks for shipment to customers and the water, known as residue water, was drained overboard and discarded. In more recent years the value of the water soluble chemicals in the residue water was recognized and the water became commercially marketable as "stick" water. At this time (1930's), the fish oil was mostly used in paint. The fishing vessels were steam powered and fueled with coal. The coal for these vessels came to the fish factory by barge and was unloaded and piled on the coal pier with steam powered machinery. The coal fired vessels were bunkered at the coal pier after unloading the day's catch of fish.

FISH BOATS

There was a fleet of five (5) wooden menhaden fishing vessels all powered by steam engines using coal as fuel.

Named as follows:

	<u>LENGTH</u>	<u>BREADTH</u>	<u>DEPTH</u>	<u>BUILT</u>	<u>WHERE</u>	<u>HORSEPOWER</u>
A. Brooke Taylor	146.0 x	23.3 x	11.0	1913	Wilmington, Del.	500
Helen Euphane	112.0 x	20.4 x	9.3	1902	Pocomoke City, Md.	100
Rappahannock	121.0 x	19.9 x	8.2	1903	Pocomoke City, Md.	225
Northumberland	134.2 x	20.2 x	9.3	1897	Pocomoke City, Md.	350
G. S. Allyn	150.4 x	20.0 x	10.7	1878	Mystic, Conn.	600

At some time these vessels had as Captain, the following:

A. Brooke Taylor	Captain Harry Armistead
Helen Euphane	Captain Clarence Snow
Rappahannock	Captain Roman George
Northumberland	Captain Johnny Armistead
G. S. Allyn	Captain Edward Shelton

These boats as a whole had top speeds ranging from 12 to 15 knots with cruising speeds from 11-13 knots light and would hold from 300,000 to 500,000 menhaden fish with a crew of 32 men each.

The fish were spotted from the crow's nest at the top of the mast by the Captain, Mate, and striker boatman all watching at the same time for the location of the school of fish, the direction in which they were traveling and the approximate size of the school. This information was shouted below to the crew who were instantly mobilized in a joint effort to make ready to catch the school of menhaden. Meanwhile a small wooden boat, called the striker boat, with one man and a set of oars, was being launched by means of a cable from the gaff powered by a donkey engine. These boats were often carried on deck in the vicinity of the fish hold so that they could be lowered into the water quickly. This man would row ahead of the purse boats in a standing position with one foot forward facing the bow of his boat following and pointing to the school of fish by removing one oar from its lock and pointing to the school as they swam along keeping the location of the fish constantly in view.

In the meantime the two wooden purse boats, each carrying one-half the purse net, were being vigorously rowed toward the school of fish as directed by the striker. The purse boats were usually carried in the boat davits but sometimes were towed along behind, particularly if they had just been used that day and might be needed to make another set very quickly. Once close to the school of fish and having determined their direction and speed, the purse boats located themselves in front of the moving school, as they rowed one purse boat to the left, the other to

the right, while they dropped the large black purse net into the water. The bottom line with its brass rings caused the net to sink toward the bottom and the top line with its cork floats caused the net to float vertically in the water as the two purse boats moved ahead in a circular path and once again met on the back side of the school of fish. At that point, the net was connected making a complete circle around the school of fish. Next, the bottom of the net was drawn together with the help of a lead, bell shaped, 500 pound weight called a tom which was dropped to the bottom from the larger purse boat called the Captain's boat causing the entire school of fish to be enclosed within a sort of bag and unable to escape. At this point, the men would take their oars out of their locks allowing them to float alongside, tethered to the purse boats by a short piece of line with the purse boats floating close to the cork line and outside the net. The tom with its connecting purse lines was then lifted into the purse boats and the men would begin pulling on the bottom line of the net and placing the brass purse line rings on holding rods attached one to each purse boat. After the bottom line was pulled aboard the two purse boats and the gap in the purse net effectively closed, they would continue to pull the net aboard the purse boats until the fish were contained within a small area enclosed by the net. The striker boatman, once the tom was lifted, moved to the opposite side of the net from the

purse boats and placed the cork line over the stem of the striker boat which would hold the net up on that side in case the pressure from the school of fish started to sink the cork line, which would allow them to escape from the net. (NOTE: Several thousand large menhaden fish all headed in the same direction and all moving their tails in a swimming motion, would exert many tons of force on a net if allowed to have swimming room within the confines of the net.)

By then the fish boat had pulled alongside the two purse boats and the fish jumping and flipping in an effort to escape the confining net made a beautiful sight for the fishermen. The bailing aboard of the fish from the purse net into the hold of the fish boat was done with a huge bailing net, called a scap net, on a long handle made of a small sapling tree guided by one man chanting directions to four other men. One man hoisted the loaded net over the fish hold with a cable from the gaff to a donkey engine for power and the second man controlled a release line that was fastened to the bottom of the bailing net. This release line was used to open and close the bottom of the bailing net during the bailing operation. The third man controlled the port and starboard movement of the bailing net with a line from a location in the aft purse boat. This was another fascinating sight to behold seeing this large bailing net scoop up a mixture

of silvery flipping menhaden fish mixed with water and as it was hoisted high in the air it assumed the general appearance of a huge stinging nettle with the bailing net as its head and the water streaming down as its tail. When the fish hold and decks were loaded with fish or when that certain time in the afternoon approached, no matter how many fish had been caught, the fishboat headed for the factory. As the boats approached within hearing distance of the factory they would blow three long whistles if they had a large catch or three short whistles for a small catch. As they approached the factory if it was still daylight you could tell at a great distance what sort of load they had according to their draft. If you were impatient and wanted to know sooner you could always spot the smoke from the smoke stacks of these boats long before you could see the boats themselves and with a pair of binoculars you could usually tell the size of their catch long before they got within whistle range. The factory was powered by three oil fired steam boilers and the size of the catch determined how many boilers would be lit off in preparation for processing the incoming catch of fish. If it was dark upon their arrival at the factory, you just had to wait for the whistles and sometimes they wouldn't blow at all especially if the catch was small. The boats arriving at night were a silent but beautiful sight with all the deck lights, mast lights and port and starboard running lights glowing in the dark and showing the general outline of the fishing steamer along with the smoke and

an occasional burst of white steam. This homecoming atmosphere was enlivened by the sound of the men shouting back and forth from the boat to the pier as they tied up, the boat's crew just being glad to be home after a hard day's work and the excitement of the factory manager and factory crew over a hopefully good catch.

THE PURSE NET

The typical Menhaden Net was about 600-700 feet long and about 30 feet deep with a 1 inch square mesh. The net was, as the fishermen expressed it, "hung" or mounted with manila ropes lashed to it at both top and bottom. To the top rope were also fastened the cylindrical cork floats whose buoyancy offset the weight of the net and caused it to float to the surface while the bottom rope, in addition to being fastened to the net, also carried the brass rings through which the purse rope passed. This combination of top buoyancy and bottom weight caused the net to float vertically in the water and allowed it to be drawn around a school of fish much like a moveable fence. The purse line at the bottom of the net, when drawn tight, caused the bottom of the net to be closed so that the fish were contained in a large open topped mesh bag from which they could be removed (bailed) with smaller scoop nets and dumped in the fish hold of the vessel in which they would be transported to the factory for processing. The nets were woven of cotton string and treated with pine tar or pitch, which had been thinned with oil to make it flexible and allow it to penetrate the cotton net and function as a preservative to protect the net from mildew and rot. This mixture when first applied would always rub off on hands and

clothing but became less apt to do so as the season progressed. The nets were heavily salted each night when stored aboard the fishing vessel or purse boats and this salt also aided in their preservation. However with the best of care these cotton nets would only last for one fishing season.

The nets would always need some maintenance and repair during the season and for major repairs they were often rolled onto one of two large net reels made of wood and positioned at the head of one of the piers at the factory. Getting these large heavy nets on the reels was very difficult, especially turning the reels in order to roll up the net. These reels were constructed in much the same fashion as an ancient treadmill so that three large men could walk inside the reel and thereby furnish the power to roll up the net. Getting the nets off the reels was usually a fairly simple task of just pulling and unwinding them.

THE "COMPANY" STORE

During the latter part of the Nineteenth, and the first part of the Twentieth Centuries, the "Country Store" was a very necessary part of the lives of all people, except those living in the most densely urbanized areas; and to those living near and working at factories in remote and sparsely populated locations the "Company Store" was an integral part of their lives. It was readily accessible and they could buy on credit against earned wages due them from the factory. These stores were called "Company Stores" because they were owned and operated by the company providing employment in the area and they stocked the items most necessary in the daily activities of the working community.

The Menhaden Products, Inc., Company was no exception to this general practice, and operated its store from the lower floor of a combination office/store building; the office activities for the factory and fishing vessels being carried out in two rooms on the first floor of this structure which was located in the strip of buildings between the "Potomac" pilot house and the fish factory. This office/store building was of traditional wooden frame construction having a weatherboard exterior with first and second floor porches on the front side of

the building, (facing the river). The first floor porch had steps from porch to ground level at both ends and round wooden columns which helped support the second floor porch and gave the structure more the appearance of a dwelling than that of a necessary part of a manufacturing operation. This building being close to the water was built on piling and had a short pier which gave access from the front porch to small boats in the river.

Upon entering the central hallway via the double doors from the front porch, you would see to the left the two offices used by Walter Mercer, General Manager, and Henderson T. Hedrick, the Bookkeeper. To the right was the area that functioned as the "Company Store" location. Here you would see country cured hams, sides of bacon and cylinders of sausage and bologna hanging from the ceiling. the shelves were stocked with the articles considered essentials of the times: Coffee, tea, sugar, salt, pepper, lava and lifebuoy soap, tobacco, matches, flour, corn meal, cereal, etc. This store also carried articles considered necessary to the everyday life of the fish boat crews and factory laborers such as work clothes, boots and oilskins. The fishing vessels also used the store as a resource for everyday supplies. All food for these vessels came through this store. Ice for fresh meat and cool drinks was obtained from an ice plant in nearby Irvington.

Walter Mercer and Henderson Hedrick each had two rooms on the second floor of this building. Mr. Mercer lived there during most of the work week and went home to Whitestone on weekends. Mr. Hedrick, whose home was in Norfolk, lived there for the entire fishing season. A brief note of explanation is in order here. The drive from Whitestone to Norfolk, in those times, was a hard and hazardous all day trip.

"POTOMAC" PILOT HOUSE

STEAMER POTOMAC

Length 176.8 Feet

Breadth 35.8 Feet

Depth 11.0 Feet

Steam Power, Coal Fired, 450 H.P.

Gross Tonnage (Capacity) 763

Combination Passenger and Freight Service

Crew - 36

Built - 1894, Philadelphia, Pa.

Home Port - Baltimore, Md.

The Potomac was typical of the so called "Bay Steamers" of her time and was well suited to the type of service in which she was engaged. In size these steamers ranged from slightly smaller to 75% larger than the Potomac, and in general represented the most dependable and best means of communications and passenger and freight transportation in the Chesapeake Bay area. During the last quarter of the Nineteenth and the first quarter of the Twentieth Centuries the roads in this part of Virginia were very poor by present day (1988) standards; the automobile was either non-existent or in the early stages of its development; rail

service while good was limited as to areas served and accessibility, so the Bay Steamers served the Chesapeake Bay and rivers tributary thereto in much the same way that the Mississippi riverboats had served the Central U. S. area fifty years earlier during Mark Twain's lifetime. The larger steamers would make overnight runs from Washington, D.C., Alexandria and Baltimore to Norfolk, Old Point Comfort or Newport News and back again the next night. This was good dependable service and satisfied what was a very real need in this bay area.

The Potomac ran from Baltimore to various points on the bay and the Rappahannock River as far up as Fredericksburg; it carried freight and passengers and was the most convenient means of obtaining goods from Baltimore due to its regular weekly trip around the bay and was certainly the most comfortable and dependable means of travel for people of this era, around the turn of the century.

During the 1930's with the improvement in roads and the increased use of automobiles and trucks the popularity of the Bay Steamers declined and the Potomac was sold to the paper mill in West Point, Va. to be converted to a wood pulp carrying barge. It was sent to Colonna's Shipyard in Norfolk for the conversion work. The pilot house which was approximately 15' x 35' was lifted off in one piece by the floating derrick John F. Hagerty and placed on a flat deck barge. At this time the Colonna

Brothers (W. W. Colonna, Sr. and B. O. Colonna, Sr.) owned the Taft Beach Fish Factory at Whitestone, Virginia. This pilot house was ideally suited for use as temporary housing and its use for this purpose offered an opportunity to preserve this memento of the past so the Colonna Brothers had it transported on a barge to the Taft Beach location where the barge was beached and the pilot house rolled ashore on heavy timber tracks. All lights, signal bells, housetop searchlight, etc. were left in working order. The structure was divided into three general areas; the front part or living area, originally the wheelhouse, with the bunks and sleeping area behind that and a kitchen in the extreme rear part of the building. It was used as temporary living quarters for the owners and their families when they visited the factory and as overnight accommodations for business associates from out of town, if needed.

In later years this property was acquired by two brothers Robbins and their brother-in-law Douglas. These gentlemen in a further effort to preserve this link with the past gave it to the Mariners' Museum in Newport News where it is now located and undergoing restoration.

THIS IS THE WAY BEN COLONNA, JR. REMEMBERS THOSE DAYS

My first real contact with a fish factory occurred when I was about 7 or 8 years old. I had heard much discussion about them as my father and Uncle Will owned and operated one at Ditchley, Virginia and I was eager to see what one looked like. My father decided to take me with him on a visit to the Ditchley Plant and we left home early in the morning in his 12 cylinder Packard. We took the ferry across the James River to Jamestown; drove from Jamestown to Warsaw -- from there to Kilmarnock and from there to Ditchley. The total trip was about 150 miles and took all day as it was dark when we arrived at the fish factory. At that time (C1930) there was no Rappahannock River ferry; the distance from Norfolk was about 150 miles and many of the roads were unpaved clay which when wet were slick and muddy. This condition would necessitate lacing rope around through the wooden spoked wheels on the automobile to prevent their miring in the sticky mud, and there was almost always a stretch of road in that condition. There are many things about these early days at the fish factory that I do not remember, being quite young at this time, but one thing that stands out in my memory was the size of the plant and the fishing vessels. They seemed huge to a small boy and their size was probably magnified by the reflection of

their many lights in the water alongside the piers. At any rate, this small boy was awestruck by the magnificence of the scene. As I recall, the fishing vessels had black hulls with red houses trimmed in white and white masts. Another thing that stands out in my memory was the sound of a reciprocating pump which pumped cooling water to the condenser on one of the vessels. These are some of my first impressions of a fish factory that was struck by lightning and burned on March 31, 1933 in the depths of the Great Depression.

After the destruction of the Ditchley Fish Factory, my father and Uncle Will allowed their boats to fish for a factory owned by Colin Chilton during the 1933 season and I remember much discussion about what would be done to obtain another factory. These efforts resulted in the purchase of the Taft Beach factory sometime in late 1933 or early 1934. I remember my first visit to the Taft Beach Factory where I stayed for a while during the summer of 1934. I went up to the factory on the M/V Virginia Dare which had a 140 H.P. Fairbanks Morse engine. Luther Lawson was the engineer on the Dare and we towed a barge with 300 tons of coal to be used as fuel at the fish factory; also onboard the Virginia Dare was my moth boat with which I would practice sailing during the summer. I remember that I kept the moth boat anchored offshore at the factory when I wasn't sailing and would wade back and forth to it in the shallow water. I remember that when I first saw the factory it was painted maroon in color, the

buildings had rather low pitched "A" roofs covered with tar paper roofing and were about 18' tall. The factory had three docks and the whole complex looked very large to a boy who was only about 12 years old at the time. I had my clothes in a canvas bag and we were met at the dock by Walter Mercer who told me that I could stay in the Northeast second floor room over the office and store; Walter Mercer had the Northwest corner room in which he stayed during the week. Walter's cousin, Henry Mercer, ran the store at this time. Walter then took me to the cook house, which was located between the office building and the fish meal storage room, and introduced me to Captain Billy Benson the cook from Weems, Virginia and his two black helpers who helped cook and wash dishes. I remember looking at the old dinner bell on a post outside the cook house and wanting to ring it, but of course did not dare to do such a thing.

Walter Mercer then took me on a tour through the plant and I remember the large rolling doors to the boiler room. The fireman, a Mr. Booth, nick-named "Boofus", was a good natured man and the object of many jokes by Walter Mercer. I remember seeing many cats around the plant, different colors and combinations of colors. I remember seeing one dog, mixed breed, brown and white with two black spots; one behind his head and one on his hip. This dog had long hair and apparently was part collie. Walter Mercer threw a piece of a cork float into the water and the dog went overboard and retrieved it. The dog named Sandy seemed to

enjoy this game and would retrieve the cork as long as anyone would throw it for him. I remember that Boofus had a speech impediment and would pat his legs with his hands as he attempted to enunciate his words. Walter next introduced me to Charlie Miller who ran the unloading elevator. I remember Charlie as a tall man in his early 30's with black hair. As we walked thru the plant, Walter explained the fish processing method to me and introduced me to the men who were in charge of the main sections of the plant where last night's catch was still being processed. Billy Diggs was the next person that I met. He was in charge of the raw box, cooker, presses and oil/water separation tanks and usually had two men helping him run the machinery. From the presses the meal fell to a concrete floor and was fed to the dryer by a conveyor. The dryer was a steel open end cylinder about 8 feet in diameter and 50 feet long mounted on rollers and slightly inclined from the horizontal so that as it rotated the meal would travel from the higher entrance end to the lower exit end. The meal was dried by hot air blowing through the dryer from an oil fired heater. All of this machinery was steam driven from a reciprocating engine through a series of shafts and flat belts. I don't remember the name of the man who ran the dryer but I do remember that he wore bib overalls and a straw hat. The hat had a label on the front of it that read James S. McGraw, Richmond, Virginia. This was a popular model of cap with a brim, black with yellow letters and much used around the fish factories. When the whistle blew for the evening meal, everyone

went to the cook house where the 12' long bare topped wooden tables were set with enameled metal dishes, coffee mugs and coffee pot with a can of condensed milk (opened with an ice pick) for the coffee. Everyone sat on long wooden benches with their friends; the white men in one room and the black men in another room. Walter Mercer introduced me to the group and requested them to look out for me; he also admonished me not to go too close to the oil vats. The meals were good with lots of food and the pies, made with dried apples and peaches, stand out in my memory as some of the best pies that I ever tasted. "Captain" Billy Benson's cook house was his headquarters there at the factory and I remember that he had a bunk room with a desk and bed for a rather informal sort of office.

After eating supper, the men would sit around the big open door of the factory in the cool breeze and wait for the fish boats to return with the day's catch. There would be a lot of talking and playing jokes on one another, particularly Walter Mercer joking with Boofus. One popular contest was broad jumping at which both Walter and Boofus were somewhat better than most anyone else. From this location you could see about 10 miles to the mouth of the Rappahannock and first you would see the smoke from the vessels, then the mast tops, then the houses and finally the hull outline of the vessel. During my stay at the factory that summer, I often watched from the second floor porch of the office building from which I had a good view and usually a cool

breeze. The boats would blow their whistles indicating the size of the catch, Boofus would light off the boilers, the factory men would assemble on the pier to help tie up the boats and unload the fish and I would stay back out of the way of all this activity until the lead boat had tied up. While waiting to unload, the boats would shift to the coal dock and bunker coal for the next day's fuel supply and the boat crews would go to the company store for soft drinks; the most popular being Coca Cola, Orange Crush and Nehi Chocolate. Shortly after arriving at the factory I went aboard the fish boat A. Brooke Taylor and met the engineer Herbert Wise, a very friendly man who had a son about 2 or 3 years older than myself that they called "Punkie". Herbert's wife was named Cordelia and they lived in Irvington, Virginia but at one time had lived in Norfolk on Wilson Road (Campostella). They were a very friendly family and Cordelia would often walk from Irvington to the factory and meet Herbert when his boat tied up since she could hear the boat's whistle at home and recognize which one it was by the tone. Herbert had a dark green Studebaker car with a black canvas top that they drove to the Irvington store on Saturday and church on Sunday. During the week they walked wherever they wanted to go as they didn't have much money to spend on gasoline. I became very friendly with Herbert Wise and his family and about a month after my arrival at the plant he asked me if I would like to go out on the fish boat with him. I said Yes, I would like to go very much and after getting the approval of my father I made several trips with

Herbert. When I was sleepy I would sleep in Herbert's bunk if he was on watch or the Second Engineer's bunk if it happened to be his watch. As I remember I would make about 2 trips each week and on other days would sail my moth boat, not going too far from the factory. I had been instructed by my father to not go beyond a certain line of oyster stakes but I did and he saw me beyond the stakes on one of his trips to the factory. My father threatened to demolish my moth boat with an axe but Walter Mercer talked him out of it, however he prohibited me sailing any more for several days. I came back home the latter part of August on the tug Dorothy bringing with me (2) fish factory kittens which I kept at home and my moth boat which I tied up at Carl Bock's dock behind the Machine Shop at the shipyard. This was a particularly memorable summer for me as a young boy and I recall with special pleasure the summer activities, many of which were entirely new experiences for me. I also recall with affection the kindness and hospitality of the people with whom I came in contact at the factory. That winter the fish boats tied up at the shipyard on the west side of #4 pier (#5 now) and the engineers who were paid \$75.00 a month winter wages did maintenance work on them. I remember that Willie Walker was chief on the Northumberland, Herbert Wise was chief on the A. Brooke Taylor and that the chief on the Rappahannock had a lame leg. My friend Boofus also worked on the boats during lay-up time in the winter.

During the summer of 1936, while at the plant, I slept in a small metal house that had been set up close to shore line for use as a place to change clothes when the families of some of the foremen and supervisors in the factory would come there to swim. This building had cinder block steps, a screened door facing the river and screened windows on each end. I used a bucket of water for quick wash-ups but when I wanted an all over bath I used Walter Mercer's bathroom in the office building. This small metal house, being uninsulated, was too hot for occupancy during the day but at night it afforded very pleasant sleeping quarters; being close to the water you could hear the waves lapping on the beach, there was usually a cool breeze off the river and the window screens kept out the insects. I remember the nights there as being quiet and restful. The foremen and factory specialists who lived on site during the production season were housed in (2) two-story wooden buildings set back in the vicinity of the factory. I saw my father frequently that summer when he would attend the forced sale of one of the many small fish factories in that part of the country. He would attend since most of those operations owed money to the shipyard and sometimes he could help to run the price up so that the shipyard would benefit along with the other creditors. During those depression days you could buy a factory and (4) fish boats for about \$40,000.00. I went to several of those sales with my father and recall one sale when bidding against Dick Hayes, who wanted the factory, Captain Ben won the bid when Hayes stopped at \$35,000.00. After the auction

was finished, Captain Ben sold Hayes the factory for \$100.00 profit. I remember that "Sandy" the factory dog liked butter, in addition to meat, on the biscuits that I would take him from the cook house. Captain Billy Benson, the cook, liked to fish and spent much time fishing from the end of the pier; he would cook the soft crabs that I caught in the salt pond and I remember them as being some of the best that I ever ate. I also remember the time that Walter Mercer came into the cook house and ate my soft crabs before I had a chance to get them. On Saturday afternoon, Boofus would dress up and put on a white shirt which Walter Mercer would pull off him if he had the opportunity; I don't know why Walter did this but Captain Walter would usually give Boofus another white shirt. I remember that Frank Wise (brother to Herbert Wise - Chief on the A. Brooke Taylor) had trouble keeping a wife and after marrying the fourth one he remarked that she was so ugly that no one would try to take her away from him. Frank had a Model T Ford car that he drove occasionally and which was a particularly good type of car for the muddy country roads of that day and time; however, Frank and his Model T met their match on a small hill in the clay road near the plant after a heavy rain. The levers controlling the ignition advance and throttle advance were mounted on the steering column under the steering wheel and were pulled down to achieve maximum power. As Frank expressed it "She wouldn't climb that slick hill even though I had both ears pulled back on her". I remember that Bill Diggs ran the presses and the oil/water separator tanks and that his son Bill Diggs,

Jr. went on to play professional baseball. Charlie Miller was the elevator man and his family would, with Walter Mercer's permission, go swimming from the beach there at the factory. Walter Mercer's nephew who was 18 or 19 years old at the time ran the company store and his cousin Henry gave up the store to help keep the books for the factory. The Whitestone Beach Restaurant and Dance Hall was about the only local facility for entertainment and was run by a man named Culver. The building was built on pilings next to the steamboat dock and store and had guest rooms for visitors, restaurant facilities and a dance floor for Friday night dances. These were family type dances and Mr. Culver did not allow any alcohol at these functions. There was also a swimming pier with a net to keep out stinging nettles and for a fee of 10 cents you could swim inside the net protected area. There was also a diving board and ladder to the water.

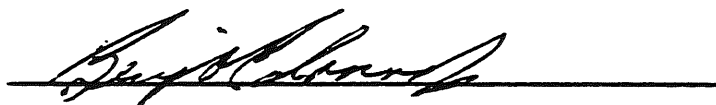
Captain Will Bowles (Steamer G. S. Allen) took me on my first visit to Culver's Beach and not knowing that I could swim became frightened when I jumped overboard. I remember that Charlie Harper had a work boat named "TIME" that he used for fishing parties and kept tied up at the swimming pier. The bay steamer Potomac would tie up at the steamboat dock to discharge and load general cargo and passengers and on one occasion when Bill Jones had come up on the Glenn with Captain Ben he put on his Excelsior Band uniform and went over to try to make friends with some of the chamber maids on the Potomac. Bill returned

somewhat disillusioned after one of the ladies emptied a chamber pot on his uniform. I remember that Colin Chilton lived in a house on a bluff that overlooked Culver's Beach; also that the bath houses at the swimming pier were whitewashed inside and that when the wind went due west, vapor from the fish meal dryer at Taft Beach would be carried to the Culver Beach area which annoyed the customers as the odor was quite unpleasant. I remember that Mr. Culver made a very good banana split for 10 cents. The Holly Ball, which was the formal event of the year, was held at Kilmarnock, the queen being selected by the Junior League. I attended this very nice event and stayed up until 4 a.m. which was an unheard of thing for me to do at that age (14).

The summer of 1937 I started going out on the fishing vessels as oiler with Herbert Wise and in this capacity began to learn more about the actual operation of the fishing steamers. While aboard boat I wore only undershirt, short pants and tennis shoes and would put on a shirt only when I went into Whitestone.

I had my "Hampton 1" boat with me that summer and on July 4 I sailed it to Irvington for the Rappahannock Day Celebration which consisted of baseball games, foot races, sailboat races, a beauty contest and various other activities; as things turned out I entered and won the sailboat race. The Commodore Maury which was a steel hulled, diesel powered vessel that belonged to the Virginia Fisheries Commission acted as the starting line boat for

all the races including the work boat races which became somewhat rough at times. I sailed into Irvington Creek to the Irvington Inn next to the Sinclair dock. Miss Rappahannock came in on a barge with the Queen's Court and the Virginia State Governor Perry who crowned the Queen. I walked up the street about 1-1/4 miles to the school grounds where the Rappahannock Day Ceremonies were conducted, speeches made and trophies presented. I remember that Bill Tolman fired the signal cannon on the Commodore Maury and the heavy wadding of the salute charge struck a newspaper man, bruising him. Rappahannock Day was a very gala summer celebration of a type that belongs to a bygone era.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ben Colonna, Jr.", is written over a solid horizontal line.

Ben Colonna, Jr.

PERSONAL MEMORIES - W. W. COLONNA, JR.

TAFT BEACH MENHADEN FISH FACTORY - WHITE STONE, VIRGINIA

Some personal memories of visiting the fish factory as a young boy. I was born in 1929; my father and uncle owned the factory from 1933-1939 so I couldn't have been over 10 years old. I don't remember how many times or how often I was there but to this day some of my most vivid memories are of that factory, it's boats, people and things that took place there.

The first memories are of driving to the fish factory by car and waiting in line on the south side of Rapp. river to catch the ferry boat to the Whitestone side, the very large and steep hill the car had to go down to reach the lower level of the land the factory was built on, arriving at the white pilot house of the old steamer Potomac in which my mother, father, sister Carolyn and I stayed. Carolyn and I could hardly wait to go swimming in the water and sandy beach just in front of the pilot house, seems we always had a couple of old car tire inner tubes to play with and float on and once in a while with a grown person we would walk up the beach to the left (north) not too far to a beach where grown ups and children from the area went to swim, buy soft drinks and just have fun, they had a section of the water fenced

off with wood poles and fish net to keep stinging nettles away from the swimmers, it seems like there were a series of wooden buildings there with at least the main one near and partially over the water. This is where most of the people were and the buildings were built of wood and had sort of a worn white paint look.

To the right of the pilot house started the factory out buildings then the factory. First, I remember a two story white wooden structure, the company office and store where Walter Mercer, the company manager was. Downstairs there were all sorts of supplies, food and otherwise, for the fish boats. Upstairs there was a porch across the front of the building where we watched for the fish boats returning to the factory each evening. This building was real close to the water with a little pier in front of it. My father and Walter Mercer had broad jumping contests off the boardwalk approach to the pier marking their jumps in the sand. Heading south and to the right was the Cook House where we ate at least some of the time. There was Captain Billy the Cook with big biscuits and raisin pudding and flies, so many flies you wouldn't believe it with fly paper and flies stuck to the paper hanging down from the ceiling in a twisted fashion, there were lots of them hanging all around. I remember most vividly someone saying make sure when you eat your raisin pudding that there are raisins in the pudding and not flies. That stuck in my mind. Next I remember the main plant itself with the piers

out front in the water and the big unloading house out near the end of the second pier, the big net reels at the head of the first pier, often with men mending the nets. You see most of my time was spent swimming and playing on the beach and watching things going on around the factory. The raw box is one place they couldn't keep me out of once I learned I could climb down in it and get good edible fish among the menhaden and if I took them to Captain Billy he would cook them for me. I think I overdid it because I remember my mother saying, "Billy, I think we've had enough fish for a while", but I do remember being very proud of this accomplishment.

The smell of a fish factory will just take your breath away and I remember that but I also remember other people coming to the factory and remarking about it and thinking it doesn't smell bad to me anymore, so I guess you get accustomed to the smell after being there a while.

Back to the factory, the tanks where the fish oil was separated from the water were always interesting to me because the man who was in charge of this operation was always tasting the oil from a little tin can nailed to a wooden stick and I remember him sticking the oil with a wooden paddle and you could tell how much fish oil was on top of the water in a tank that way.

Bagging fish meal fascinated me as it came out of a wooden chute in the factory and a negro man would place a burlap bag under the chute; as the fish meal filled the bag the man would swiftly sew the top of the bag closed with a large bowed steel needle leaving two ears on either side of the top of the bag that were used for lifting the bags by hand and placing them in long rows on the warehouse floor. The thing that most impressed me was how fast this man could sew up these bags leaving ears all done with sort of a rhythm of movement of his body and hands and sometimes making chanting sounds, saying something, singing or something I'm not sure just what.

I remember the boiler room and a steam dynamo that made electricity and how the lights would get brighter or dim as the man made the dynamo go faster or slower; also, remember a bucket of hard crabs someone brought in to be steamed and this same man had a steel pipe and valve on the end of a steam hose and he put the end of the pipe in the bucket of crabs and turned on the live steam and what a noise it made and how quick it cooked and turned the crabs red. I remember it scared me because I knew how hot that steam was and what it would do to you.

Hand fishing was good from the factory piers with crab and cut up pieces of fish for bait on a long piece of white string with one or two hooks and a sinker; feeling the fish nibble I

would jerk the line catching lots of fish, among them a rather small flat fish I always called a butterfish but since then have been told they were not butterfish, maybe not, but that's what I thought I was catching. The water was deep and clear, so clear you could often see fish swimming around the wooden pilings pretty deep down.

Some of my most vivid memories are going out on the fish boat and I only remember going out on the A. Brooke Taylor, the largest boat of a fleet of five. I couldn't wait until my dad would say we were going. This meant getting aboard the fish boat late at night since the boats left usually before light the next morning to be on the fishing grounds by sunlight. I can remember walking down the pier to the boat at night with Mother and Dad and how excited this young boy was at the thought of getting aboard that beautifully lighted up boat and going fishing with Captain Harry Armistead, the boat's Captain, and of all the thrilling things I was going to experience the next day and boy was that true. First I remember our room that mother and I stayed in and maybe dad, I don't remember. It was on the second deck portside just in back of the pilot house. One night mother said she was going to hook the screen door because she had heard some people walked in their sleep but I think she had visions of this boy walking out on the deck while she was sleeping and maybe falling overboard or wandering around the boat by myself and she wanted no part of any such nonsense. I remember eating in the

boat's galley and how much food they had, especially the pies and again the flies and it seemed like I stayed hungry all the time, and the boat's cook giving me goodies to eat between meals. It was a real experience to have been part of that operation seeing all those men working together catching those fish, spotting the fish from the crow's nest, shouting the sighting below, seeing men running down the decks and getting into the purse boats rowing away with big oars and circling the school of fish. Then the fish boat would slowly but carefully move alongside the purse boats and the bailing of the fish aboard would begin, what a sight with that big bailing net and silvery fish flipping, water flying through the air, men singing and chanting as all this was happening, what a sight to behold and to implant in my memory forever.

All this I vividly remember but strange as it may be I vividly remember equally as well something you wouldn't think so important. The memory is that of standing on the second deck portside just opposite the back end of the pilot house leaning my head out over the deck rail, looking ahead with the wind blowing my hair and getting a little salt spray on my face watching the boat slide silently through the water with just the sound of waves splashing against the hull of the boat and lying on my bunk bed in our quarters listening to the wind make strange but pleasant sounds as it blew through the screen door, lying there just waiting to hear shouts from the crow's nest that fish had

been spotted therefore putting the whole process in action again, including me jumping off my bunk and out to watch once again just as if I was a member of the big men's team.

I have made several trips to the fish factory since I was a boy and the factory was still standing. The big hill at its entrance didn't seem as big and the factory didn't seem as large which I guess is natural but the memories were as large or larger than ever. I would wish every young boy could have such memories to draw from and I can tell you from experience, especially as you get a little older, they are worth more than gold or money in the bank in a lot of ways.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Bill Colonna". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent "B" and "C".

Bill Colonna

1930's MENHADEN FISH FACTORY

TAFT BEACH - WHITESTONE, VIRGINIA

The seven paintings in this group, along with the associated explanatory text are all parts of an attempt to preserve some of the comparatively little known facts concerning an industry which flourished in the first half of this century on the U. S. East Coast and had a momentous effect on the lives of people on the Chesapeake Bay in general and the area of the Rappahannock River in particular.

The story that these paintings by Casey Holtzinger tell is also part of the history of one menhaden fish factory, the Taft Beach Factory at Whitestone, Virginia, and its fleet of fishing vessels owned by B. O. Colonna Sr. and W. W. Colonna Sr. of Berkley, Norfolk, Virginia from 1932 to 1939.

The first six paintings show, in logical sequence, some of the most important steps in the catching of the fish; from the time the vessels would leave at night for the fishing grounds until their arrival back at the processing plant late the next evening.

The seventh painting, titled "Potomac Pilot House", shows a pilot house which had been removed from the Bay Steamer "Potomac" when she was decommissioned. The structure was used at the factory as temporary living quarters for the owners and their families when they visited the factory and overnight accommodations for out of town business associates.

7 HOLTZINGER PAINTINGS

SERIES

1930's MENHADEN FISH FACTORY

TAFT BEACH - WHITESTONE, VIRGINIA

<u>OFFICIAL NUMBER</u>	<u>SERIES NUMBER</u>	
10	1 of 7	<u>HEADIN' OUT</u> Dawn in the Chesapeake Bay, with choppy seas and full speed in search of the menhaden.
22	2 of 7	<u>FISH SPOTTED</u> First sighting, with fish boat stopped and striker boatman pointing, manning purse boats for catch.
23	3 of 7	<u>MAKIN' THE SET</u> Men in purse boats netting school of menhaden.
25	4 of 7	<u>BAILING ABOARD</u> Bailing fish from purse net aboard fish boat.
24	5 of 7	<u>LOADED AND HEADIN' IN</u> Late evening with vessel deck loaded and tired men resting, approaching the fish factory.
26	6 of 7	<u>1932 MENHADEN FISH FACTORY</u> <u>Taft Beach, Whitestone, Virginia</u> An active and productive plant processing raw menhaden into fish meal and oil.
21	7 of 7	<u>POTOMAC PILOT HOUSE</u> From 1894 Chesapeake Bay steamer to 1930's shoreside fish factory guest house.

SUGGESTED HANGING OF PAINTINGS

Best Displayed in one straight line number 1 thru 7, left to right with framed description off left hand end or as suits.

COLONNA'S SHIPYARD, INC.
400 E. Indian River Road
Norfolk, Virginia

OFFICIAL
NUMBER 10

SERIES
NUMBER
1 OF 7



HEADIN' OUT

Dawn in the Chesapeake Bay, with choppy seas and full speed in search of the menhaden.

OFFICAL
NUMBER 22

SERIES
NUMBER
2 OF 7



FISH SPOTTED

First sighting, with fish boat stopped and
striker boatman pointing, manning purse boats

OFFICIAL
NUMBER
23

SERIES
NUMBER
3 OF 7



MAKIN' THE SET
Men in purse boats netting school of menhaden

OFFICIAL
NUMBER 25

SERIES
NUMBER
4 OF 7



BAILING ABOARD

Bailing fish from purse net aboard fish boat.

OFFICIAL
NUMBER 24

SERIES
NUMBER
5 OF 7



LOADED AND HEADIN' IN
Late evening with vessel deck loaded and tired men resting,
approaching the fish factory.



OFFICIAL
NUMBER 26

45

SERIES
NUMBER
6 OF 7

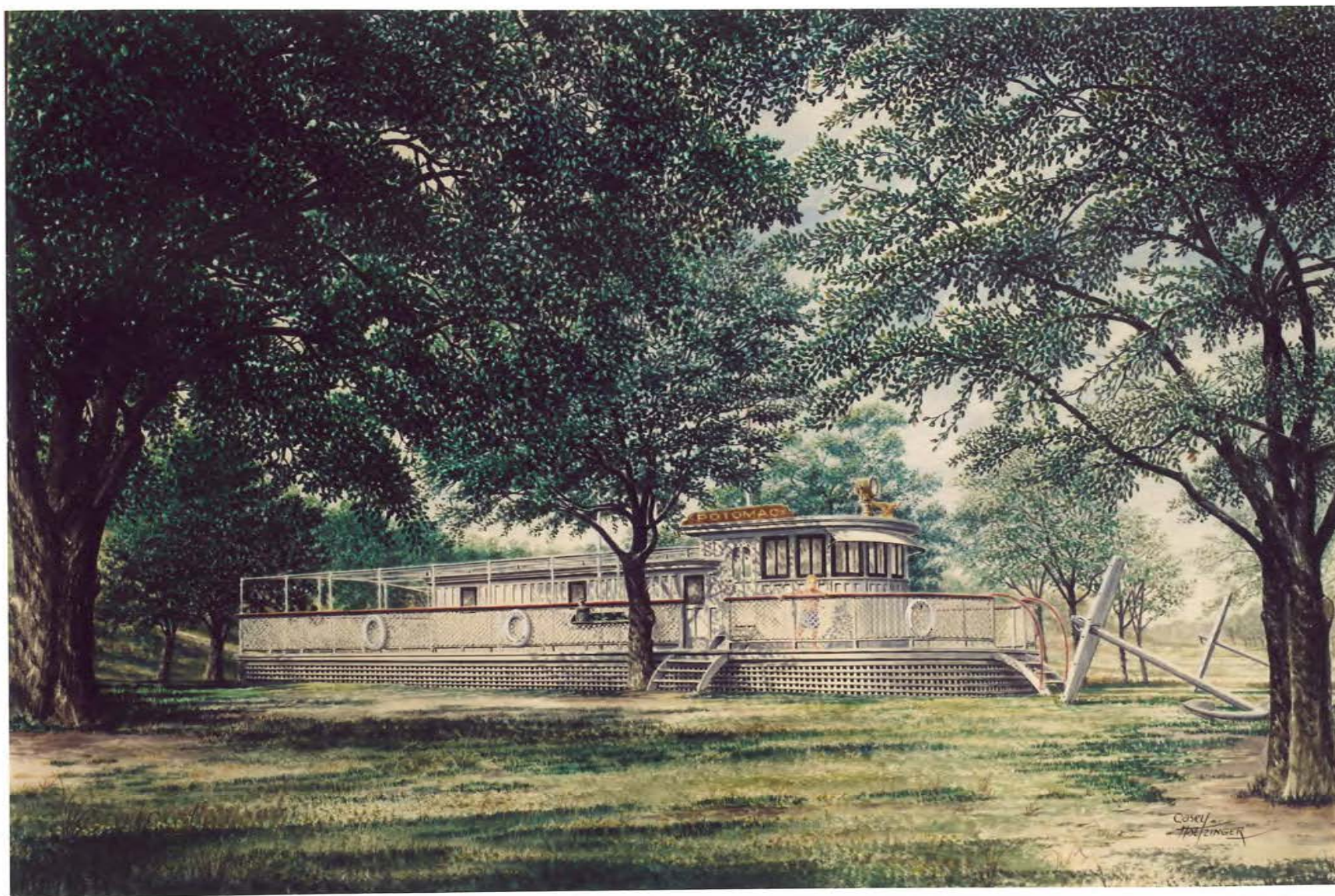


1932 MENHADEN FISH FACTORY
Taft Beach, Whitestone, Virginia

An active and productive plant processing raw menhaden into fish meal and oil.

OFFICIAL
NUMBER 21

SERIES
NUMBER
7 OF 7



POTOMAC PILOT HOUSE

From 1894 Chesapeake Bay steamer to 1930's shoreside fish
factory guest house.

MENHADEN F/V A. BROOKE TAYLOR - 1930's

Length: 146.0 ft. Breadth: 23.3 ft. Depth: 11.0 ft.

OFFICIAL NO. 211345

GROSS TONNAGE: 205

NET TONNAGE: 159

Built: Wilmington, Delaware - 1913 of wood construction

Crew of 32

Powered by: A 500 Horse Power Triple Expansion Steam Engine

Used coal as fuel

Named after: A. Brooke Taylor, a Norfolk native in the real estate business and a man well-liked and well thought of.

This boat fished mainly the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries catching millions of fish which were bailed aboard the fish boat, then taken to the fish factory where they were processed into fish meal and oil which in turn was used mainly for fertilizer and oils for paint.

She was one of 5 fish boats operated by Menhaden Products, Inc., owned by Captain Ben Colonna, Sr, and Captain Will Colonna, Sr. of Norfolk, Virginia and fished from their fish factory at Taft Beach, White Stone, Virginia during the mid 1930's. She was a typical menhaden fish boat of her day but larger than most and said to have had good fishing qualities.

The fish were spotted from the crow's nest at the top of the mast then the purse boats were rowed by hand to circle, set and catch the fish. When the fish were caught in the net and brought alongside the fish boat, they were bailed into the fish hold with a large bailing net powered by a steam operated donkey windlass.

Top speeds ranged from 12-15 knots with cruising speeds of 11-13 knots light and would hold approximately 400,000 menhaden fish deckloaded.

Harry Armistead was Captain. He was of average height but a little stocky. Considered a gentlemen and one of the top fisherman on the Chesapeake Bay.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 1 of 7 titled "Headin' Out" (Dawn in the Chesapeake Bay with choppy seas and full speed in search of the menhaden.

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and should be viewed together.
 Part No. 1 consists of a written history
 Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
Established 1875

MENHADEN F/V HELEN EUPHANE - 1930's

Length: 112.0 ft. Breadth: 20.4 ft. Depth: 9.3 ft.

OFFICIAL NO. 96610

GROSS TONNAGE: 178

NET TONNAGE: 86

Built: Pocomoke City, Maryland - 1902 of wood construction

Crew of 32 - 100 Horse Power 2-cylinder horizontal compound Steam Engine

Used coal as fuel

This boat fished mainly the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries catching millions of fish which were bailed aboard the fish boat, then taken to the fish factory where they were processed into fish meal and oil which in turn was used mainly for fertilizer and oils for paint.

She was one of 5 fish boats operated by Menhaden Products, Inc., owned by Captain Ben Colonna, Sr, and Captain Will Colonna, Sr. of Norfolk, Virginia and fished from their fish factory at Taft Beach, White Stone, Virginia during the mid 1930's. She was a typical menhaden fish boat of her day and said to have had good fishing qualities.

The fish were spotted from the crow's nest at the top of the mast then the purse boats were rowed by hand to circle, set and catch the fish. When the fish were caught in the net and brought alongside the fish boat, they were bailed into the fish hold with a large bailing net powered by a steam operated donkey windlass.

Top speeds ranged from 12-15 knots with cruising speeds of 11-13 knots light and would hold approximately 300,000 menhaden fish deckloaded.

She was considered a small boat, but a beautiful model.

Clarence Snow from Middlesex County was Captain. He was a quiet man who listened a lot and was a real gentleman. An average size man with white hair and mustache. He was considered a good fisherman.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 2 of 7 titled "Fish Spotted" (First sighting with fish boat stopped and striker boatman pointing, purse boats being manned for catch.

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and should be viewed together.

Part No. 1 consists of a written history

Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
Established 1875

MENHADEN F/V RAPPAHANNOCK 1930'S

LENGTH: 121.0 ft. BREADTH: 19.9 ft. DEPTH: 8.2 ft.

OFFICIAL NO: 111445

GROSS TONNAGE: 146

NET TONNAGE: 71

BUILT: Pocomoke City, Maryland - 1903 of wood
construction

Crew of 32 - 225 horse power steeple compound steam engine

Used Coal as fuel

Named after the beautiful Rappahannock River.

This boat fished mainly the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries catching millions of fish which were bailed aboard the fish boat, then taken to the fish factory where they were processed into fish meal and oil which in turn was used mainly for fertilizer and oils for paint.

She was one of 5 fish boats operated by Menhaden Products, Inc., owned by Captain Ben Colonna, Sr, and Captain Will Colonna, Sr. of Norfolk, Virginia and fished from their fish factory at Taft Beach, White Stone, Virginia during the mid 1930's. She was a typical menhaden fish boat of her day, of average size and said to have had good fishing qualities.

The fish were spotted from the crow's nest at the top of the mast then the purse boats were rowed by hand to circle, set and catch the fish. When the fish were caught in the net and brought alongside the fish boat, they were bailed into the fish hold with a large bailing net powered by a steam operated donkey windlass.

Top speeds ranged from 12-15 knots with cruising speeds of 11-13 knots light and would hold approximately 330,000 menhaden fish deckloaded.

Captain Al Grenell from Middlesex County was the boat's Captain, he was tall and thin with a long neck. He was called the wild man because he would set on small, large or any size schools of fish. He wore his boots all the time never took them off around the factory and on the vessel.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 3 of 7 titled "Makin' The Set" (Men in purse boats
netting school of menhaden.)

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and
should be viewed together.
Part No. 1 consists of a written history
Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard,
Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
Established 1875

MENHADEN F/V NORTHUMBERLAND - 1930's

Length: 134.2 ft. Breadth: 20.2 ft. Depth: 9.3 ft.

OFFICIAL NO. 130733

GROSS TONNAGE: 167

NET TONNAGE: 99

Built: Pocomoke City, Maryland - 1897 of wood construction

Crew of 32 - 350 Horse Power 2-cylinder horizontal compound Steam Engine

Used coal as fuel

Named after the County of Northumberland in the Whitestone-Reedville area.

This boat fished mainly the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries catching millions of fish which were bailed aboard the fish boat, then taken to the fish factory where they were processed into fish meal and oil which in turn was used mainly for fertilizer and oils for paint.

She was one of 5 fish boats operated by Menhaden Products, Inc., owned by Captain Ben Colonna, Sr, and Captain Will Colonna, Sr. of Norfolk, Virginia and fished from their fish factory at Taft Beach, White Stone, Virginia during the mid 1930's. She was a typical menhaden fish boat of her day, of average size and said to have had good fishing qualities.

The fish were spotted from the crow's nest at the top of the mast then the purse boats were rowed by hand to circle, set and catch the fish. When the fish were caught in the net and brought alongside the fish boat, they were bailed into the fish hold with a large bailing net powered by a steam operated donkey windlass.

Top speeds ranged from 12-15 knots with cruising speeds of 11-13 knots light and would hold approximately 375,000 menhaden fish deckloaded.

Johnnie Armistead from Matthews County was Captain, he was a stocky built man always looking for a big school of fish. He was considered a good fisherman.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 4 of 7 titled "Bailing Aboard" (Bailing fish from purse net aboard fish boat.

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and should be viewed together.
Part No. 1 consists of a written history
Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
Established 1875

MENHADEN F/V G. S. ALLYN - 1930's

Length: 150.4 ft. Breadth: 20.0 ft. Depth: 10.7 ft.

OFFICIAL NO. 85527

GROSS TONNAGE: 211

NET TONNAGE: 136

Built: Mystic, Conn. - 1878 of wood construction

Crew of 32 - 600 Horse Power Triple Expansion Steam Engine

Used coal as fuel

This boat fished mainly the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries catching millions of fish which were bailed aboard the fish boat, then taken to the fish factory where they were processed into fish meal and oil which in turn was used mainly for fertilizer and oils for paint.

She was one of 5 fish boats operated by Menhaden Products, Inc., owned by Captain Ben Colonna, Sr, and Captain Will Colonna, Sr. of Norfolk, Virginia and fished from their fish factory at Taft Beach, White Stone, Virginia during the mid 1930's. She was a typical menhaden fish boat of her day.

The fish were spotted from the crow's nest at the top of the mast then the purse boats were rowed by hand to circle, set and catch the fish. When the fish were caught in the net and brought alongside the fish boat, they were bailed into the fish hold with a large bailing net powered by a steam operated donkey windlass.

Top speeds ranged from 12-15 knots with cruising speeds of 11-13 knots light and would hold approximately 450,000 menhaden fish deckloaded.

She had a reputation as a Tender boat, being very long and narrow she laid down easily while bailing fish or in winds. She was not considered a good quality boat.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 5 of 7 titled "Loaded and Headin' In" (Late evening with vessel deck loaded and tired men resting, approaching the fish factory.)

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and should be viewed together.
Part No. 1 consists of a written history
Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
Established 1875

1932 MENHADEN FISH FACTORYTAFT BEACH - WHITESTONE, VIRGINIA

The Taft Beach Fish Factory was located on a low lying sandy beach on the beautiful Rappahannock River near Whitestone, Virginia.

This factory was a full facility plant built of wood frame construction with board and batten exterior. It had five vessels to supply it with fish and was manned and managed by local people from the Whitestone and nearby areas. It operated during the warm weather months from late April until early October.

It was a well designed steam powered plant, built in the shape of a "U" with the manufacturing process so laid out that the raw fish were introduced at one end of the "U", emerging as finished product (oil and meal) at the other end of the "U".

This plant also had its own company owned store for day to day supplies and guest accommodations for overnight visitors.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 6 of 7 titled "1932 MENHADEN FISH FACTORY" - An active and productive plant processing raw menhaden into fish meal and oil.

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and should be viewed together.
Part No. 1 consists of a written history
Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard,
Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
Established 1875

"POTOMAC" PILOT HOUSE - 1930's

1988

STEAMER POTOMAC

Length 176.8 Ft. Breadth 35.8 Ft. Depth 11.0 Ft.

Steam Power, Coal Fired, 450 H.P.
 Gross Tonnage (Capacity) 763
 Combination Passenger and Freight Service
 Crew - 36
 Built - 1894, Philadelphia, Pa.
 Home Port - Baltimore, Md.

The Potomac was typical of the so called "Bay Steamers" of her time and was well suited to the type of service in which she was engaged. In size these steamers ranged from slightly smaller to 75% larger than the Potomac, and in general represented the most dependable and best means of communications and passenger and freight transportation in the Chesapeake Bay area. During the last quarter of the Nineteenth and the first quarter of the Twentieth Centuries the roads in this part of Virginia were very poor by present day (1988) standards; the automobile was either non-existent or in the early stages of its development; rail service while good was limited as to areas served and accessibility, so the Bay Steamers served the Chesapeake Bay and rivers tributary thereto in much the same way that the Mississippi riverboats had served the Central U.S. area fifty years earlier during Mark Twain's lifetime. The larger steamers would make overnight runs from Washington, D. C., Alexandria and Baltimore to Norfolk, Old Point Comfort or Newport News and back again the next night. This was good dependable service and satisfied what was a very real need in this bay area.

The Potomac ran from Baltimore to various points on the bay and the Rappahannock River as far up as Fredericksburg; it carried freight and passengers and was the most convenient means of obtaining goods from Baltimore due to its regular weekly trip around the bay and was certainly the most comfortable and dependable means of travel for people of this era, around the turn of the century.

During the 1930's with the improvement in roads and the increased use of automobiles and trucks the popularity of the Bay Steamers declined and the Potomac was sold to the paper mill in West Point, Va. to be converted to a wood pulp carrying barge. It was sent to Colonna's Shipyard in Norfolk for the conversion work. The wooden pilot house which was approximately 15' x 35' was lifted off in one piece by the floating derrick John F. Hagerty and placed on a flat deck barge. At this time the Colonna Brothers (W. W. Colonna, Sr. and S. O. Colonna, Sr.) owned the Taft Beach Fish Factory at Whitestone, Virginia. This pilot house was ideally suited for use as temporary housing and its use for this purpose offered an opportunity to preserve this memento of the past so the Colonna Brothers had it transported on a barge to the Taft Beach location where the barge was beached and the pilot house rolled ashore on heavy timber tracks. All lights, signal bells, housetop searchlight, etc. were left in working order. The structure was divided into three general areas; the front part or living area (originally wheelhouse) with the bunks and sleeping area behind that and a kitchen in the extreme rear part of the building. It was used as temporary living quarters for the owners and their families when they visited the factory and as overnight accommodations for business associates from out of town, if needed.

In later years this property was acquired by two brothers Robbins and their brother-in-law Douglas. These gentlemen in a further effort to preserve this link with the past gave it to the Mariners' Museum in Newport News where it is now located and undergoing restoration.

1932 Menhaden Fish Factory
 Taft Beach - White Stone, Virginia

SERIES

Painting No. 7 of 7 titled "POTOMAC PILOT HOUSE" (From 1894 Chesapeake Bay steamer to 1930's shoreside fish factory guest house.

NOTE: The history of this operation is in two parts and should be viewed together.
 Part No. 1 consists of a written history
 Part No. 2 (7) paintings by Casey Holtzinger

This Exhibit Produced, Owned and Displayed by Colonna's Shipyard, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia
 Established 1875