

SHOWBOAT

1995

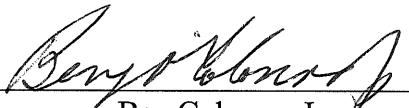
I remember the original "Showboat" well. It was really called the James Adams Original Floating Theatre, the same showboat on which Edna Ferber traveled and worked as she gathered background material for her famous novel "Showboat". Being born in 1922, I was about 13 years old (circa 1935) during the Great Depression. Visiting Herbert Wise and his wife, I played with their son, Punky, who was a little older than I. During this visit, Mrs. Wise took Punky and myself to the Showboat in Irvington, Virginia, on Carters Creek at a cost of 25 cents each..

The Showboat was a wooden barge with a house on it about two stories tall. It traveled up and down the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries during the summertimes only, tying up at different river landings staying there two to three days putting on shows.

The crew maintained this tug and showboat and some also had parts in the plays if just small parts. Inside had a stage at one end and wooden chairs that were hooked together for seating the audience. A small orchestra sat at the foot of the stage at audience level. There was a series of acts that lasted about 10 minutes each then often a change of costumes with another 10 minutes or so to follow one after the other. The Showboat had a dark green hull with a white house trimmed in dark green the same as the hull. There was a gang plank you had to cross over from the wharf to the Showboat. I also remember it appeared to me as being very plain - nothing fancy. The Showboat was pulled from location to location by a small tugboat.

Imprinted well on my youthful brain is the memory of being seated rather close to the stage and as the play proceeded, two men got into a terrible argument over a lady, then suddenly one man pulled out a pistol shooting the other man at close range. Seeing the yellow and blue flames thrust from the pistol along with the terribly loud noise from the discharge all happening so fast as not to give warning, I screamed out loud only to have the audience laugh more at me than the horrors of the play.

To this day at age 73 the images remain so vivid it was as if it happened yesterday.


Ben Colonna, Jr.

10/19/95
Date

OVER





Deep Creek was a favorite stopping place of the James Adams Original Floating Theatre during the first half of this century. A local resident recalls the excitement that swept the community as the showboat, towed by the tugs, *Elk* and *Trouper*, nuzzled into her berth alongside the old wooden wharf a few hundred feet south of the canal locks. This was the showboat on which Edna Ferber traveled and worked as she gathered background material for her famous novel, *Show Boat*. Courtesy of the Kim Memorial Library



In November 1929, her performances in Deep Creek concluded, the James Adams Original Floating Theatre hit a snag in the canal and partially sank. Completely blocking the canal for several days before being raised, she was repaired and restored to service by the following spring. Photograph by John C. Emmerson, Jr. Courtesy of the Mariners' Museum of Newport News, Virginia

