

Maryland Historical Trust
State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No. T-527 ²⁸

Magi No.

DOE ☐ yes ☒ no

Entered in M.R. 5/16/85

CHESAPEAKE BAY SKIPJACK FLEET THEMATIC GROUP

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic CLAUDE WILSONERS

and/or common skipjack

2. Location

street & number Old Ferry Terminal, Washington St. n/a not for publication

city, town Claiborne n/a vicinity of congressional district First

state Maryland 024 county Talbot 041

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Captain Bob Lambert

street & number telephone no.:

city, town Claiborne state and zip code Maryland

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. n/a liber

street & number folio

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title Survey of Surviving Traditional Chesapeake Bay Craft

date 1983-1984 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town Annapolis state Maryland 21401

7. Description

Survey No. T-527

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			n/a

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

This vessel is a 42 1/2' long two-sail bateau, or V-bottomed deadrise type of centerboard sloop, commonly referred to as a skipjack. She was built by cross-planked construction methods in typical Bay fashion. Built in 1911 in Youngs Creek, Virginia, she has a beam of 14', a depth of 3', and a net register tonnage of 6 tons. She carries a typical skipjack rig--a jib-headed mainsail laced to the boom and carried on wooden mast hoops, and a single large jib with a club on its foot. The vessel is painted white and the wood hull is sheathed with metal at the waterline.

In shape, the CLAUDE W. SOMERS has a sharp, raking clipper-like longhead bow with a squared bowsprit and a square, transom stern. The transom stern is shallow, with a pronounced rake. The rudder is carried outboard on pintles mounted on the transom and skeg. [The transom was due for repairs in late 1983, which may have resulted in a change in size or appearance.]

The vessel is flush-decked. From the stern forward the deck structures include: a box over the steering gear, on which the wheel is mounted; a tall cabin, with no windows but a slide; a small deck hatch; a tall box built over the winders; and a low main hatch on the foredeck. The vessel is fitted out for oystering with rollers amidships on the rails; winders; dredges; and pipe davits over the stern from which is suspended the motorized pushboat. The pushboat has a 350-horsepower Chevrolet engine. A fuel drum is carried on the skipjack's afterdeck and is connected to the pushboat's engine.

The raking mast is set up with double shrouds, forestay, and jibstay. A topping lift leads to the end of the boom, which is jawed to the mast. Other standing rigging includes a chain bobstay and chain bowsprit shrouds. Both mainsail and jib have lazyjacks for easier furling.

The sole decoration on the vessel is a white-painted sphere at the masthead. At the time of survey the trailboards had been removed.

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates	1911	Builder/Architect	Unknown
check: Applicable Criteria:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D		
and/or			
Applicable Exception:	<input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D <input type="checkbox"/> E <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> G <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> none		
Level of Significance:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input type="checkbox"/> state <input type="checkbox"/> local		

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

This vessel is significant as being one of the 35 surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and a member of the last commercial sailing fleet in the United States. Out of a fleet of hundreds of skipjacks that worked Bay waters in the early years of this century, today only this small number remain to carry on the tradition of working sail.

The skipjack evolved as a distinct type of Bay vessel in the 1890's as a cheaper-to-construct alternative to the earlier bugeyes and other traditional framed craft, in a period when shipbuilding costs were rising and the oyster catch was diminishing. The type was devised by enlarging (to 25 to 60 feet) the hull of the ordinary, unframed, square-sterned Bay crabbing skiff, and giving it a deadrise bottom, a-deck, a cabin, and a sloop rig. The result—with its unframed, hard chine, cross-planked, v-bottom—proved inexpensive to build, easy to repair, and could be constructed by a competent house carpenter. Skipjacks were specifically designed as oyster dredge boats, with wide beams and low freeboard lending stability and providing a large working space on deck. The single masted rig, with sharp-headed mainsail and large jib, was easy to handle, powerful in light winds, and handy in coming about quickly for another pass over the oyster beds.

The Maryland oyster season begins November 1 and ends March 15. Skipjacks must dredge under sail on all days except Mondays and Tuesdays, when they are allowed to use their motorized pushboat for dredging. The pushboat, normally carried on davits at the stern, is lowered into the water and literally "pushes" the skipjack along from behind, the nose of the pushboat resting against a "jig" on the stern of the skipjack. The pushboat can also legally be used to get the skipjack to and from the oyster beds each day. Each skipjack's crew is made up of the captain, who is often also the owner, and five crew members.

CLAUDE W. SOMERS is also significant as being one of the older skipjacks still dredging in the Chesapeake fleet. She was built in 1911 in Young's Creek, Virginia following traditional Bay-area design and construction methods. She joined the oyster fleet in the heyday of skipjack building, before World War I, and has dredged ever since, currently working out of Tilghman Island. CLAUDE W. SOMERS is remembered as having been involved in the worst fishing disaster in recent Chesapeake history. In March, 1977, six men including the owner and skipper, Thompson Wallace of Chance, Maryland, were drowned when the SOMERS went over in a 70-knot squall near Hooper Strait Lighthouse. Five of the men lost were related to one another. The boat was subsequently sold and now oysters out of Tilghman. CLAUDE W. SOMERS is one of the 21 surviving working skipjacks to have been built previous to 1912, although, like the other members of the fleet, she has been much repaired over the years in good Chesapeake Bay tradition.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No.

See Thematic Group nomination cover form, Continuation Sheets
No. 8-13.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acreQuadrangle name Claiborne, MDQuadrangle scale 1:24000UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A

1	8	3	8	8	2	0	4	2	9	9	1	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing							

B

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C

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D

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Verbal boundary description and justification

This working vessel is usually docked at the location indicated in
Item 2. Historic boundaries are coterminous with the hull.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Witty/ M. E. Haywardorganization Radcliffe Maritime Museum
Maryland Historical Societydate May, 1984street & number 201 West Monument Streettelephone (301) 685-3750city or town Baltimorestate Maryland 21201

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by
an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated
Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and
record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of
individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
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