



# BUGEYE TIMES

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
**CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM**

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## Drum Point Lighthouse - Its Origins Revisited

By Richard J. Dodds, *Curator of Maritime History*

At the time the Drum Point Lighthouse was moved to the Calvert Marine Museum in 1975, volunteer researchers began gathering information on the history of the lighthouse. The National Archives in Washington provided the main source for this documentation. The results were incorporated into the museum's excellent pamphlet, *The Drum Point Lighthouse*, and provide the basis for what we know of its history today. This article is the result of a reexamination of this early work, combined with new research, particularly on the origins of the lightstation. Highlights from the surviving station logbooks provide some additional insight on one of Maryland's most distinctive buildings.

### "The Necessity of a Light at This Point is Very Great"

A report by Lt. William D. Porter to the Secretary of the Treasury, Levi Woodbury, in 1838, provides the earliest reference to establishing a navigational aid at Drum Point.<sup>1</sup> Lt. Porter urged that a beacon-light be placed on Drum Point, at the mouth of the Patuxent River:

The necessity of a light at this point is very great, as all vessels bound up or down the Chesapeake put in at this place during the winter to seek protection from floating ice; and as the entrance is formed by a low sand spit, which cannot be seen at night, vessels are often obliged to anchor outside the above mentioned point until daylight, and, in consequence, are often driven ashore in heavy and adverse winds.

At this time, nearby Solomons Island, or Sandy Island as it was then known, had only one house; it was not until 1870 that Isaac Solomon opened his cannery and shipyard.

No apparent action was taken on Porter's recommendation. In 1843, however, the value of Drum Point as a potential lightstation was again suggested in a report on Chesapeake Bay aids to navigation written by Henry Prince to Secretary of the Treasury John Spencer.<sup>2</sup> In addition to its value in creating a harbor of refuge, stated Prince,

The Light House might combine with its usefulness to the commercial community, the service of aiding in the protection of the Province, as it certainly is the most proper place to station an officer of the Customs to observe the transactions of the many vessels which frequent, and take shelter in the Harbor.

This recommendation, like the earlier one, elicited little response on the part of the Treasury Department. Action was not taken until 1853, when Lt. A. M. Pennock of the Light House Board again urged the board to take steps to build a lighthouse.<sup>3</sup> On August 3, 1854, a congressional appropriation for lighthouses, lightships, buoys, etc., included \$5,000 for a lighthouse on Drum Point.<sup>4</sup>



*Drum Point Lighthouse, circa 1907. This early view of the lighthouse was thought to be nineteenth century, but recent evidence points to a later date. Just visible in the lantern is the narrow dark sector that warned mariners of the shoal off Sandy Point from 1899 to 1911. The platform underneath the lighthouse was probably not added until 1899. Keeper James Locke Weems may be the taller of the two men standing on the walkway. (Copied from a postcard owned by Mrs. Philip D. Lines)*

Events did not proceed as planned, however. Federal law required that clear title to the intended site be obtained and the consent of the state legislature in which the site was located be received before any public money was spent. Towards this end the Maryland General Assembly, on March 3, 1856, passed *An Act Relative to the Establishment of a Light-House on Drum Point, at the Mouth of the Patuxent River, in Calvert County, and to Cede to the United States the Jurisdiction of the State of Maryland in, to, and Over a Site for the Same*. The act appointed Alexander Somerville of Calvert County and Isaac Denison of the City of Baltimore as commissioners to ascertain and fix a fair value on any site, at or near Drum Point, selected by an agent of the Light House Board. A limit of ten acres was set by the state. As it turned out, jurisdiction was never transferred, as

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## LATE NEWS

There have been two staff appointments this fall: Karen E. Peterson will fill the curator of education vacancy left by Craig De Temple. Ms. Peterson was most recently the site director of Sunnyside, a nineteenth century historic house in Tarrytown, New York. Mrs. Paula Bohaska returned to CMM as an aquarist, a duty she performed several years ago before the development of the present Estuarium.

Several new books of possible interest have appeared recently. A rather thorough study, entitled *Chesapeake Bay Skipjacks*, has been written by Pat Vojtech and includes numerous color photographs. Published by Tidewater Publishers, the book sells for \$29.95. Another Tidewater publication is John Page Williams's *Chesapeake Almanac*, 236 pp., \$14.95. CMM member James E. Ablard has published *History of the Chesapeake Ranch Estates*, 151 pp., \$14.75 plus tax. These books are available at the CMM museum store, except that by Jim Ablard, for which call him on 586-0093.

It's still not too late to join CMM's "Maritime England" trip in spring 1994. Call Lord Addison Travel, 1-800-326-0170, for details. CMM will benefit from your travel!

## FOSSIL FACTS

BY SANDY ROBERTS

### THE MIRACULOUS OVUM ANGUINUM

The Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23 to 79), in his *Natural History*, expressed great interest in mysterious eggs which the ancient Druids of Gaul claimed were formed by a midsummer gathering of twisting and twining snakes. These snakes would exude a frothy foam from which was created a ball-shaped egg (*Ovum anguinum*). Writhing and hissing, they would toss the egg high in the air. This egg, if stolen on Midsummer's Eve, was said to possess miraculous curative powers. To retain these powers, however, it was absolutely necessary that the egg be caught in the air and never allowed to touch the earth. Whoever would obtain the egg must leap across the mass of roiling snakes, catch the falling egg in a cloth, dash to the nearest river, plunge in, and swim across before stopping for a breath. The furiously pursuing snakes presumably could not swim. Ownership of an *Ovum anguinum* guaranteed lifelong protection from "poisons and pestilential vapors." From Pliny's description, it is obvious that *Ovum anguinum* referred to a fossil sea urchin, although he did not give enough evidence to identify precisely which species.

Through the ages, fossil urchins have been worn to insure victory in battle and to win disputes. They have been licked, rubbed on the skin, and, when powdered and mixed with water or wine, taken internally to cure bladder (three full glasses recommended), gall, and kidney stones. One fossil urchin, *Echini marinae*, found in the chalk pits of Kent, England, and filled with "fine, pure chalk," was used well into the nineteenth century by British seamen as a remedy for "subduing the humours of the stomach." More locally, fossil sea urchins (*Echinocardium marylandiense*) are known from the Miocene deposits of Calvert Cliffs, where they are rare and highly sought-after finds.



A fifteenth century woodcut depicting the capture of an *Ovum anguinum*.

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The bugeye was the traditional sailing craft of the Bay, and was built in all its glory at Solomons, the "Bugeye Capital of the World." Membership dues are used to fund special museum projects, programs, and printing of this newsletter. Address comments and membership applications to:

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## TAX CHANGES FOR 1994

CMM's Development Office has been watching recent changes in the tax laws affecting donations. Many of these, generally effective after January 1, 1994, have been reported in the press.

**Tickets and services:** when any charity offers a service, ticket, or auction item (*a quid pro quo* contribution) at a cost of \$75.00 or more, the charity must advise the contributor in writing of the value of the goods or service that cannot be claimed as a contribution deductible for federal income tax purposes. Token goods or services or those without market value are not reportable. Separate payments made at different times of the year for separate functions will not be aggregated, but IRS will develop regulations to prevent abuse. Charities that do not disclose the required information may be subject to penalties. (Purchases without a charitable element — such as goods from the museum store — are not involved in this requirement since they are not deductible for income tax purposes.)

**Contributions in excess of \$250.00:** Under a new law, any cash or noncash charitable donation of \$250.00 or more will require written substantiation from the charity. The form of the substantiation is flexible, but the requirement is the responsibility of the donor and must be obtained by the donor prior to filing a tax return — no receipt, no deduction! A canceled check will no longer satisfy this requirement. For noncash contributions worth \$250.00 or more, the charity must describe the donated property and indicate whether any goods or services were given in exchange. The charity is not required to place a value on the property it receives. As with *quid pro quo* donations, separate payments generally will be treated as separate contributions and not aggregated in applying the \$250.00 threshold. Any organization knowingly providing a false written statement will be subject to penalties.

CMMS members can be assured that these new tax changes will be observed in 1994 and appropriate substantiation will be provided on a routine basis. Since the responsibility is placed on the taxpayer, however, please advise the Development Office if your documentation is not received when expected. Also remember that there may be significant tax advantages from gifts of appreciated assets (stock, real estate, or a work of art) where the asset's full and fair market value is recognized for deduction, without tax upon the gain. As with all matters pertaining to income taxes, however, potential donors should consult their tax advisers about their individual tax situation.

## DON'T FORGET THE YEAR-END APPEAL!

CMM's Year-End Appeal was announced to members early in December, but it remains open through February 11, 1994. So there's still plenty of time to support the museum with an unrestricted gift. This type of support augments the budgeted funds and makes possible a number of projects and purchases not otherwise funded.

It is hoped that this year's appeal will reach the \$15,000 level of donations from members and friends. Names of those who contributed will be listed in the spring issue of the *Bugeye Times*.

