

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 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 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