United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

# **National Register of Historic Places** Inventory—Nomination Form

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	es—complete applicab	le sections		
1. Nan	ne			
historic	Chesapeake Ba	y Skipjack Fleet		
and/or commor	Chesapeake Ba	ay Skipjack Fleet		
2. Loc	ation			
street & number	er See individua	al inventory forms	n	a not for publication
city, town		vicinity of	congressional district	
state		code county		code
3. Clas	ssification			
Category  district building(s) structure siteX object S	Ownership public  X private both Public Acquisition in process being considered X not applicate	Status _X_ occupied unoccupied work in progress Accessible X_ yes: restricted d yes: unrestricted ole no	Present Use agricultureX commercial _X educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park private residence religious scientific X transportation other:
4. Owi	ner of Prop	erty		
name	See individua	al inventory forms		
street & numbe	r	***		
city, town		vicinity of	state	
5. Loc	ation of Le	gal Descripti	on	
courthouse, reg	gistry of deeds, etc.	n/a		
city, town			state	
	resentatio	n in Existing	Surveys	
	y of Surviving Tra peake Bay Craft		operty been determined ele	egible?yes <sup>X</sup> no
date 1983-		·		ecountylocal
depository for s	survey records	Maryland Historica	l Trust, 21 State Ci	
city, town		Annapolis	state	Maryland 21401

# 7. Description

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Condition  excellent  X good  fair	deteriorated ruins unexposed	Check one unaltered X altered	Check one n/a original site moved date n/a	
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

#### DESCRIPTION SUMMARY:

This thematic nomination comprises the fleet of 35 Chesapeake Bay skipjacks, the last active commercial sailing boats in the United States. This vessel type was developed in the 1890s to harvest oysters by dredging in the Chesapeake Bay. Maryland's conservation laws, which allow dredging only by sail-powered vessels, account for the survival of this small fleet; dwindling oyster resources have reduced the number of skipjacks working in the Bay from approximately 1000 at the turn of the 20th century to the current 35. All of the vessels included in this nomination are traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks, built of wood according to the established type and following very similar lines. With three exceptions they all show traditional Bay area cross-planked construction methods and are box-built, with shallow draft, a hard chine, and a deadrise, or V bottom. three exceptions are fore-and-aft planked with a rounded bottom, an older method of framed vessel construction, and are among the oldest vessels in the fleet.) In shape, the skipjacks have a longhead bow with long bowsprit, a raking stem, and a square, or transom, stern. They range in length from 39% to 56' and follow the traditional skipjack proportions of being 1/3 as wide as they are long. Net registered tonnages in the group range from 5 to 21 tons, but 8 to 12 is the average. The vessels are flush-decked, and most have similar deck arrangements, although with variations in the size of cabins and hatches. From the stern forward, typical deck structures include: a box over the steering gear, on which the wheel is mounted; a cabin with a slide; a small deck hatch; a box built over the winders; and a large main hatch on the foredeck. The vessels are fitted out for oystering with rollers amidships on the rails; power winders amidships; two iron dredges; and pipe davits over the stern from which are suspended the motorized pushboat. The pushboats carry diesel automobile engines. A fuel drum is carried on the skipjack's afterdeck and is connected to the pushboat's engine. Each vessel carries a traditional skipjack rig, consisting of 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 skipjacks are painted the traditional white and most carry decorative trailboards on their longhead bows. Twenty-one of the boats in the fleet were built during the peak years of the Chesapeake oyster fisheries before 1912; ten were constructed during a revival of the oyster industry after World War II, and two were built in recent years using traditional methods and lines.

For a complete listing of the vessels included in this nomination, see Continuation Sheet No.  $\mathbf{1}$ 

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### GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

### Vessels included in Chesapeake Bay Skipjack Fleet Thematic Group:

- T-522 Rosie Parks
- T-526 Anna McGarvey
- T-527 Claude W. Somer
- T-528 E. C. Collier
- T-529 Elsworth
  - T-530 Esther F.
- T-531 Hilda M. Willing
- T-532 Kathryn
  - T-533 Lady Katie
- T-534 Lorraine Rose
- · T-535 Maggie Lee
- T-536 Martha Lewis
- T-537 Minnie V
- 'T-538 Nellie Byrd
- \* T-539 Ralph T. Webster
- \* T-540 Rebecca T. Ruark
- T-541 Ruby G. Ford
- v T-542 Sigbee
- T-543 Stanley Norman
- VT-544 Virginia W.
  - S-230 Caleb W. Jones
  - S-231 City of Crisfield
- S-232 Clarence Crockett
- \* S-233 Fannie L. Dougherty
- · S-234 F. C. Lewis
  - S-235 Helen Virginia
- S-236 H. M. Krentz
- \* S-237 Howard
- · S-238 Ida May
- · S-239 Sea Gull
- S-240 Somerset
- S-241 Susan May
- · S-242 Thomas W. Clyde

SM-366 Dee of St. Mary's

D-649 Wilma Lee

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#### GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

This thematic nomination concerns the surviving fleet of 35 traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks in Maryland. This group of vessels, 60% of which were built before 1912, represents the last active commercial sailing fleet in the United States. For that reason, this group of resources is of great national, as well as state and local importance. 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. (Two other skipjacks, Reliance and Mary W. Somers, were listed in the National Register in 1976.)

An important feature of the group nomination is the Chesapeake Bay itself, for it has been the physical and economic factors of the Bay environment over the years which have shaped the development of this uniquely local vessel type known as a "skipjack." Skipjacks were specially designed and adapted for use in Chesapeake Bay as oyster dredge boats in the 1890s, in a period when boatbuilding costs were rising and the oyster catch was diminishing. A vessel was needed that was cheaper and easier to construct than the earlier, traditionally framed bugeyes and other craft; that had a shallow draft so it could navigate the many coves and creeks of Bay waters; and that had enough sail power and deck space to operate efficiently as an oyster dredge boat. The skipjack type was devised by local boatbuilders by enlarging (to 25' to 50') the hull of the traditional, unframed, square-sterned and often flat-bottomed Bay crabbing skiff, and giving it a deadrise (or V-bottom), a deck, a cabin, and a single-masted sloop rig. The result - with its unframed, hard chine, cross-planted, 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.

Soon after their introduction to the Bay in the 1890s, skipjacks became the preferred oyster dredge boat, and by the early years of this century their numbers reached many hundreds. The peak building years were the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century. Of the 35 surviving Chesapeake Bay skipjacks, 21 were built before 1912. However, as the Chesapeake oyster fishery continued to be viable economically, and since state law limits oyster dredging to sail-powered vessels, skipjacks have continued to be built over the years to replace dying members of the fleet. The Depression years of the 1930s saw a marked decline in the oyster business and many of the older skipjacks were abandoned.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

Once business revived after World War II, however, many new vessels were added to the fleet and of our group of 35 surviving vessels, 10 date to this post-War building boom. In recent years a revival of interest in traditional boatbuilding methods, coupled with a healthy oyster industry, have led to the construction of two new skipjacks and the almost complete rebuilding of a third, all built on completely traditional lines and according to traditional Bay-area boatbuilding methods. These last three vessels, as well as the group built in the post-War era, have been included in this group nomination because 1) they were built along traditional lines and conform to the established type; 2) they represent a continuing tradition of local boatbuilding methods and skills and a perpetuation of a particular way of life related to the Bay oyster fisheries that gains significance precisely because it has taken place so recently; and 3) because the overall group of surviving vessels is so small in comparison to the numbers that once existed that it becomes especially important to include all surviving vessels of the type in the group nomination.

All of the vessels included in this nomination are traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks, built of wood according to the established type and following very similar lines. With three exceptions they all show traditional Bay area crossplanked construction methods and are box-built, with shallow draft, a hard chine, and a deadrise, or V, bottom. (The three exceptions are fore-and-aft planked with a round bottom, an older method of framed vessel construction, and are among the oldest vessels in the fleet.) In shape, the skipjacks have a longhead bow with long bowsprit, a raking stem, and a square, or transom, stern. The range in length from 39½' to 56' and follow the traditional skipjack proportions of being 1/3 as wide as they are long. Net registered tonnages in the group range from 5 to 21 tons, but 8 to 12 is the average. The vessels are flush-decked, and most have similar deck arrangements, although with variations in the size of cabins and hatches. From the stern forward, typical deck structures include: a box over the steering gear, on which the wheel is mounted; a cabin with a slide; a small deck hatch; a box built over the winders; and a large main hatch on the foredeck. The vessels are fitted out for oystering with rollers amidships on the rails; power winders amidships; two iron dredges; and pipe davits over the stern from which are suspended the motorized pushboat. The pushboats carry diesel automobile engines. A fuel drum is carried on the skipjack's afterdeck and is connected to the pushboat engine. Each vessel carries a traditional skipjack rig, consisting of 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 skipjacks are painted the traditional white and most carry decorative trailboards on their longhead bows. These painted and gilded carvings show the name of the vessel set against a background of traditional motifs, including flags, shields, and arrows, cannons and cannonballs, and trailing acanthus vines. The tradition of such carved trailboards on Bay vessels dates to the early 17th century, and seems to be a carry-over from European ship building traditions.

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GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

Although it is generally known where the surviving Bay skipjacks were built (because of required registration methods), the names of the builders of the older skipjacks have been lost, even to local oral tradition. Because skipjacks were easier to build than the earlier framed craft, they were often constructed not by specialized and established boatbuilders but by the watermen themselves or by local trained house carpenters, craftsmen who tend to historical anonymity. The majority of the skipjacks were built in the Tilghman to Deal Island areas of the Eastern Shore of Maryland, still the home of the skipjack fleet. A number built on the Eastern Shore of Virginia have always oystered in Maryland waters.

This thematic nomination is based on a survey of surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay craft conducted by the Radcliffe Maritime Museum of the Maryland Historical Society, under a grant from the Maryland Historical Trust, in 1983 and 1984. Dr. Mary Ellen Hayward, Curator of the Maritime Museum and an architectural and local historian, served as Project Director. Anne Witty, a small craft specialist and recent graduate of the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture, who has served an apprenticeship in Mystic Seaport's small crafts program, actually surveyed the vessels and provided written descriptions and historical data. Photographs of the skipjacks, both under sail on the oyster beds and, where possible, out of the water, were taken by Michael Wooten, a noted local photographer who has specialized in maritime subjects and whose work has appeared in WoodenBoat, Chesapeake Bay Magazine, and Soundings. The photographs and survey data were gathered in the summer and fall of 1983, and the spring of 1984. Dr. Hayward then coordinated the survey material with historical data available at the Maritime Museum, and working with Anne Witty, prepared the survey forms attached.

Because so few skipjacks survive in the Bay area, and because the fleet is of national significance as the last active commercial sailing fleet in the United States, it was decided to include all of the skipjacks identified in the survey.

# 8. Significance

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Specific dates	1891–1980	Builder/Architect v	arious builders	
1400-1499 1500-1599 1600-1699 1700-1799 X 1800-1899	architecture	community planning _X conservation _X economics education _X engineering _exploration/settleme	landscape architectur law literature military music	science sculpture _X social/ humanitarian theater

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The surviving skipjacks of Chesapeake Bay are significant as a group because they are the last commercial sailing fleet operating in the United States and because they are the only surviving examples of a vessel type unique to the Chesapeake Bay which was developed in the 1890s at the height of the Bay's booming oyster industry. Inexpensive to build and efficient to operate, the skipjack enabled Bay watermen to meet the continuing demand for oysters despite diminishing resources into the 20th century. In terms of marine architecture the 35 surviving skipjacks are of great significance as the only surviving examples of a type of vessel that represents a local design innovation in response to specific economic, environmental, and practical considerations. Culturally, the Chesapeake Bay skipjacks have significance for the central role they have played, and still continue to play, in the lives of the Maryland watermen. As a prime object in the continuing socio-economic and cultural fabric of the lives of the watermen, they represent a cultural continuum that extends back to the earliest years of Maryland's history.

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#### HISTORY AND SUPPORT:

The Chesapeake oyster fishery dates to the early 1800s when vessels from Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and New England came to the area to dredge for oysters. Depletion of the Bay's oyster supplies appeared inevitable and in 1820 the first conservation laws were passed prohibiting dredging in Maryland waters, thereby restricting the harvesting of oysters to the hand tongers. Such laws proved to be unenforceable, especially with the establishment of Thomas Kensett of Baltimore's first oyster cannery in 1828. Kensett had been awarded the first American patent for his process to "preserve animal, vegetable, and other perishable goods." Because oysters were an extremely perishable product for which there was a wide demand, they proved the ideal first product to be experimentally mass-marketed through the use of the canning process. Kensett's canning process allowed for national distribution of Maryland's oysters and markedly increased the demand for the product. In 1865 the earlier conservation laws were amended to allow dredging under sail in specific deep water areas by licensed Maryland vessels only. It was in this era that the Chesapeake Bay bugeye was developed from its ancestor the log canoe, as a vessel specifically designed as an oyster dredge boat. Other traditional Bay vessels - sloops, schooners, pungies - also entered the dredging fleet and by the peak years of the early 1880s there were over 700 licensed Maryland vessels engaged in dredging for oysters. In 1884-1885 a record number of 15 million bushels of oysters were marketed from the Bay.

By the 1890s, however, the oyster catch was diminishing at the same time that shipbuilding costs were rising, due to depleted supplies of large timbers and rising labor costs. The old log-bottom bugeyes - the preferred oyster dredge boats - were no longer being built because the large logs needed for the hulls were now in short supply. A more expensive, traditionally framed bugeye had taken the place of the easier-to-build log bugeye and was the only choice of new dredge boat available to watermen. (The more traditionally-designed pungies, schooners, and sloops were even more expensive to build.) The need clearly existed for an easily and cheaply constructed alternative.

The skipjack type evolved at this time from the traditional, unframed, generally flat-bottomed Bay crabbing skiffs, which were enlarged in size and given a deadrise, or V-bottom, hull. The box-built skipjacks, without bottom frames and with short cross-planks which did not have to be curved to fit the shape of the hull, were inexpensive to build and easy to repair. They could be built by a trained house carpenter or by the watermen themselves. The first recorded vessel of this type, with a cross-planked V-bottom, is the RUBY G. FORD, built in 1891 at Fairmount, Maryland and still sailing in the oyster fleet. The peak production period for Maryland's skipjacks extended from the early 1890s to the years just before World War I. Out of the 35 skipjacks still sailing Maryland's waters 21 were built in this period. By the 1930s a fleet

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### HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

that had numbered probably close to a thousand in the early years of the century had dwindled dramatically as old vessels were abandoned in the face of low oyster prices and an almost non-existent market. The post World War II era saw a revival of the oyster industry and a group of new skipjacks were added to the fleet, bringing the numbers back up into the 70s. By 1971, however, the fleet had dropped to 43 vessels, with a more or less steady decline ever since.

The Chesapeake Bay skipjack only continues to exist because of the Maryland dredging law that still allows only sail-powered vessels to dredge for oysters. Past amendments in the law now enable motorized "push" boats, or yawl boats, to be used to propel the skipjacks over the oyster beds two days a week, and it is on these "push" days when the largest catch is usually harvested. If current state laws are ever repealed in favor of private ownership of oyster beds and power dredging (as is now the case in New York and New Jersey) the traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjack will cease to exist.

The group of 35 surviving Chesapeake Bay skipjacks are significant in the following areas:

- Commerce As important elements of Maryland's oyster fishery, both in the past and the present, and as the last surviving fleet of commercial sailing vessels in the United States, the skipjacks are especially significant.
- 2) Conservation Through current state laws which discourage overfishing by prohibiting power dredging, the sail-powered skipjack plays an important role in helping to conserve the Bay's oyster resources.
- 3) Economics Historically the oyster industry has been important to the economy of the state and particularly the Bay region for well over a century. As one of the main tools for gathering oysters in Maryland the skipjacks are essential to this industry. Related industries such as canning and can-making, label-making, and the fertilizer industry are a direct result of the prominence of the oyster fisheries in Maryland. Because of the prominence of Maryland's oyster fishery, canning became the second largest industry in Baltimore during the second half of the 19th century, providing employment for large numbers of newly arrived immigrants and blacks.
- 4) Engineering/technology As examples of a local, regional innovation in marine architecture, designed for specific reasons of economic and environmental suitability, the skipjacks are particularly important as survivors of a unique vessel type.

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### HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

- 5) Social As the last surviving fleet of commercial sailing vessels in the United States, the skipjacks still function as key objects in the Maryland watermen's communities in a way that no longer exists in other parts of the country. They are a link to a past era of sail fisheries both in the human realm as well as the technical. By understanding the way these vessels function within their society today we can gain a better understanding of the lives of watermen and their communities of past eras.
- 6) Transportation Because of the geography of Chesapeake Bay, with its thousands of miles of shoreline, all local craft have always played an important role in local transportation.

The 35 surviving skipjacks included in this thematic nomination have been so included because they represent a cohesive group of all the surviving Chesapeake Bay skipjacks in working condition. (Two other skipjacks, Reliance and Mary W. Somers, were listed in the National Register in 1976.)

Twelve of the 35 skipjacks included in this nomination are less than 50 years old, but have been included in the group because they represent an important continuing tradition that is directly linked to the other members of the group. The more recently built vessels (10 during and after World War II; 2 in recent years) were built in exactly the same way, and for the same purpose, as the first skipjacks built in the 1890s. From this point of view they gain an added level of significance because they so vividly represent a continuous tradition of indigenous wooden boatbuilding in Maryland, as well as the continued economic viability of the state's oyster industry.

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San Continuation Sheet No. 12

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OMB No. 1024-0018 Exp. 10-31-84 Thematic Group

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

Chesapeake Bay Skipjack Fleet

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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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See Continuation Sheets No. 8-13.

10. Geographical Data	
Acreage of nominated property less than one acre  Quadrangle name see individual inventory forms  UMT References	Quadrangle scale
Zone Easting Northing  C	Zone Easting Northing  D
Verbal boundary description and justification These value location indicated in Item 2 on the individuare coterminous with the hull.	working vessels are usually docked at the ual inventory forms. Historic boundaries
List all states and counties for properties overlapping	state or county boundaries
state n/a code cou	unty code
state code cou	unty code
11. Form Prepared By	
name/title Dr. Mary Ellen Hayward, Curator	
organization Radcliffe Maritime Museum Maryland Historical Society	date December 1984
street & number 201 West Monument Street	telephone (301) 685-3750
city or town Baltimore	state Maryland
12. State Historic Preserva	tion Officer Certification
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:  X national state local  As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National property for inclusion in the Nationaccording to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Herita	ational Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89– nal Register and certify that it has been evaluated
State Historic Preservation Officer signature	little 5-1-85
title	date
For HCRS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the Nation	nal Register
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	REPORT OF THE PROPERTY OF THE

CLAIBORNE QUADRANGLE MARYLAND TALbot 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC) 76°15′ 1 010 000 FEET 391 38°52′30″ 4303 Tilghman Point 4302 CHESAPEAKE BAY SKIPJACK FLEET THEMATIC GROUP 4301 TALBOT COUNTY, MARYLAND 370 000 FEET Seth Point 4300 CLAUDE W. SOMERS laiborne 18-388820 -4299180 4299 50' 4298 McDaniel

Point -CHESAPEAKE Seth Point SKIPJACK K FLEET 4289000m.N. E THEMATIC GROUP TALBOT COUNTY, Dun Cove MARYLAND (579) 18-384040-4286260: Bald Eagle VIRGINIA W. Point Amys Marsh Point SIGSBEE B Turkey Neck Point LORRAINE ROSE H 18-384240-Δ 4285550: RUBY 6. FORD Change Point REBECCA T. RUARK RALPH T. WEBSTER NELLIE L. BYRD 8 MINNIE V MARTHA LEWIS30" Tilghman Island Landing MAGGIE LEE Δ  $^{\mathrm{BM}}\!\!\Delta_4$ LADY KATIE KATHRYN HILDA M. WILLING ESTHER F. TILGHMAN ELSWORTH B E.C. COLLIER ISLAND ANNA MCGARVEY 4283 Upper Bar Neck Point E

