

# THE MUSEUM NEWS

CELEBRATING THE HISTORY AND COMMUNITY OF CAPE CHARLES  
& THE LOWER EASTERN SHORE

CAPE CHARLES HISTORICAL  
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## Cape Charles Quarantine Station 1884 - mid 1930s

There is a long history of quarantine in the U. S. to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, but did you know that Fisherman Island, off the cape south of Cape Charles played a significant role in this history? In the summer of 1878, the southeastern U. S. was in the grip of a yellow fever epidemic. Protecting our nation against imported diseases fell under state and local jurisdictions and was sporadic and largely ineffective. In the wake of this latest epidemic, the National Quarantine Act was passed to increase federal involvement in quarantine activities. One of the first of three National Quarantine Stations in the country was located in Norfolk, VA. In 1884, the station moved to leased land on Fisherman Island becoming the Cape Charles Quarantine Station and Marine Hospital.

The station at Fisherman Island inspected foreign vessels for signs of infectious disease as they entered the Chesapeake Bay. The isolated location was ideal for quarantine, but it was sometimes difficult for ships to find and the shifting sands of Fisherman Island were problematic. The *Peninsula Enterprise* in September 1889 indicated a storm washed away the north end of the Island leaving the quarantine station hospital in the surf.

In 1892, a series of cholera outbreaks on passenger ships arriving from Europe prompted further legislation to increase federal quarantine authority. That same year, the federal government purchased five acres on Fisherman Island to update and expand the Cape Charles Quarantine Station and Marine Hospital. In July 1893, the *Peninsula Enterprise* reported that "The station at present consists of the steamer *Dagmar*, the receiving ship *Jamestown* and the hospital ship *Ewing*. Bids have been invited for the construction of a pier at Fisherman's Isle, upon which will be placed a steam disinfecting apparatus... Bids have also been invited

for the necessary buildings and tents for a disinfection camp... With these precautions it is thought Norfolk and Washington will be protected from contagious diseases brought in by steamers anchoring at Cape Charles." The *Wilkes Barre News* reported that "When completed, the Cape Charles Station will be one of the most effective in the country."

In the *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon Generals of the Marine Hospital from 1894-1895*, the Cape Charles Station reported having inspected 104 vessels and disinfecting five that had outbreaks of yellow fever and had the capacity to quarantine over 1,000 people. It was reported that the ship *Jamestown* had been outfitted with a complex sulfur disinfecting apparatus. In requests for the upcoming year, the station asked for a library, "on account of the enforced isolation of those unfortunate enough to be placed in quarantine and the employees of quarantine stations, it seems proper to recommend that each national quarantine station be provided with a small library of standard works."

During World War I, the war department took over Fisherman Island, stationing troops and erecting guns and batteries to provide fortification. In 1917, Dr. Ward B. McCaffrey, who had been the medical officer at the Cape Charles Quarantine Station for several years, reportedly died of a nervous breakdown due to the heavy workload at the station since the start of the war.

With the increase of vessel traffic from the war effort and the outbreak of the Influenza pandemic in 1918, \$377,326 was requested from Congress to remodel and rebuild the Cape Charles facilities for on-shore quarantine. Six to seven vessels a week were being quarantined near Fisherman Island due to influenza and the station was in desperate need of repairs.

As the national network of quarantine stations expanded and more knowledge was gained on how to combat transmission of mosquito borne diseases such as

yellow fever, the Cape Charles Quarantine Station was no longer as essential as it had once been. The station ceased operations in the mid-1930s, yet for over 50 years it played a vital role in protecting the nation from the spread of infectious disease.

## BCR2000 - Our "New" Locomotive

The BCR 2000 diesel locomotive came to us in 2018 just as it was about to go under the cutting torch when the Bay Coast Railroad (BCR) ceased operations in Cape Charles. Like other railroad stock, the locomotive had been built to last. Throughout its 60 year working life it was bought and sold by various railroad companies, each time acquiring a new name, "model designation" and paint job as well.

Our BCR 2000 was built by General Motors in 1958 as a GP9 diesel locomotive for Illinois Central Railroad. Its first name was IC9250. GP9 models contained steam generators to provide heat for passenger cars. In 1970, when hauling passenger cars became less frequent, it was converted to a GP 10 model by removing the steam generator, allowing the front of the engine to be lowered and thereby improving the  
(Continued p.2, col.2)

**Martin S. Stringfellow III**  
**Builder of Beautiful Ship Models**

In January the Cape Charles Historical Society lost Martin Stringfellow, a multi-talented member and friend. It was Martin who built most of the large ship models in our collection.

Born in Cape Charles, Martin spent his early years living in town where his family owned and operated The Eastern Shore Transit Co. His father, Martin II, was a highly skilled mechanic who kept the transit buses in good running condition, and this mechanical interest was inherited by young Martin. His cousin Lindsey Stringfellow whose family lived in the same Concourse apartments with Martin's family, recalls being struck on numerous occasions by young Martin's experimental airplanes. There was an almost constant sound of the hooting and tooting of steam engines and other mechanical contraptions being tested by him and his dad.

World War II was raging during his early years and young Martin witnessed railroad steamers, ferries, trains, tugs and barges moving large numbers of military and civilian passengers and supplies between bustling Cape Charles harbor and Little Creek and Norfolk. All of this activity stimulated in Martin a lifelong interest in all things mechanical. Martin especially loved the Eastern Shore steamers and their propulsion systems. When he boarded the *Elisha Lee* with his family, he would disappear near the engine room or watch the engine through a viewing glass for most of the crossing.

After the War the family moved their business to Chincoteague. Martin graduated from Chincoteague High School and St. Louis University with a degree in electrical engineering. His career took him to various companies throughout the United States where he worked in the field of microwave radiation. He played a major part in the development of anti-collision radar which evolved into ground terrain radar. At some point after retirement he returned to Cape Charles, became an active member of the historical society and continued his hobby of model building. He made many local steamer, ferry, tug and rail barge models, all with meticulous attention to accuracy and detail. Some displayed in the museum include, in chronological order, the side wheelers *Jane Moseley*, with a working model of its walking beam steam propulsion system, and *Cape Charles*, which carried walk on passengers as well as passenger cars originating in NYC and Philadelphia. These steamers were followed by the propeller driven *Maryland*, *Pennsylvania*, *Virginia Lee (Accomac)*, and *Elisha Lee*. All of these steamers ran the original NYP&N route from Cape Charles to Norfolk, established when Alexander Cassatt created an alternate rail

link from the industrial Northeast to southern markets across the Chesapeake Bay in 1884.

Additional models include the VFC ferries *Delmarva*, *Princess Anne* and *Pocahontas* as well as the tugs *Cape Charles* and *Cheriton*, the 'car float' rail barge *Captain Edward Richardson* and the Peninsula Ferry Corporation side wheelers *Pioneer* and *Hercules*.

The museum has had many of these models on permanent display since the 1996 Grand Opening so although Martin will be missed his legacy lives on. Please visit and see for yourself! We will be adding a plate for Martin to our memorial plaque inside the museum. Donations to CCHS in Martin's memory are welcome.

**(BCR Continued from p.1)** engineer's vision from the cab. At this time it was owned by Illinois Central Gulf Railroad and known as ICG 8250. Precision National Corp. became its next owner as PN 2000. In 1981 PN 2000 came to the Eastern Shore Railroad, was renamed ESRR2000 and was painted dark blue.

In 2006 the freight operations of the Eastern Shore Railroad passed to Bay Coast Railroad, again headquartered in Cape Charles. The locomotive received its final name BCR2000 and was painted Bay Coast Railroad iconic colors of light and medium blue. It remained in operation here until rail service ended in Cape Charles and most of the Eastern Shore of Virginia in 2018. Here on the Eastern Shore the locomotive was used to transport freight between Pocomoke, MD and Cape Charles. From Cape Charles harbor freight cars were hauled by tug on special 'car float' barges across the Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk, VA where Bay Coast Railroad ownership ended. One of Bay Coast Railroad's largest customers was Bayshore Concrete Products in Cape Charles, founded to create concrete structures for the original 1964 Bay Bridge Tunnel.

The GP10 was one of the most versatile and reliable diesel locomotives ever built and was ideally suited to the purpose for which Bay Coast Railroad used it: hauling large heavy tonnage freight. With good track it was capable of speeds of around 80 mph. Here on the Shore it ran between 10 and 25 mph. When we received the locomotive in 2018 we were responsible for moving it from the RR yard to the museum rail siding. Thankfully, Jerry Lewis, a long-time railroad employee (and the last engineer to operate the locomotive) and his friend Mike Howard, a railroad contractor, were able to get the job done. The museum is very grateful for their skill in being able to move the 90-ton locomotive safely across deteriorated track and position it on our siding. You can view video footage of the move on our web site.

*Credits: Art Tross, Alex Parry, Jerry Lewis - all BCRR; Jeff Apple - F.R.A.*

*On May 13, CCHS received a CARES Act grant of \$2,000 toward operating expenses. Funding has been provided by Virginia Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act economic stabilization plan of 2020.*