

# SKIPJACK COMMUNITY NEWS

PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE COMMUNITIES OF WENONA, DEAL ISLAND, CHANCE,  
AND DAMES QUARTER

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## CULTURE CORNER

### THE DEAL ISLAND STEAMBOATS AND DRUMMERS

BY BEN EVANS

*Ben Evans was a resident of Deal Island and a correspondent for The Baltimore Sun, Daily Times, and Maryland and Herald whose stories were reprinted by the Marylander and Herald in 1977 in a book titled Memories of Steamboats, Campmeetings, Skipjacks, and the Islands of the Chesapeake. The story excerpted here is for your reading pleasure.*

Until the mid-1930s, Deal Island, in Somerset County on Maryland's Eastern Shore, had the longest and one of the busiest commercial steamboat wharves on the Chesapeake Bay.

Shore waters around Deal Island are shallow. So, when the Maryland Steamboat Company built the wharf in 1881, it had to extend the wharf more than a quarter mile (1,420 feet to be exact) into the Tangier Sound to accommodate the steamers.

The wharf was serviced by the Baltimore, Chesapeake and Atlantic Railway's steamboats. The Virginia, Tangier, Joppa,

Avalon and Three Rivers come readily to mind, although there were many more. Through them, the wharf was the economic lifeline for all the seafood and farming communities on and around Deal Island.

The oyster season began in October and ran through March. In those months there was a heavy and constant flow of oysters from Tangier Sound and all the nearby rivers passing through the Deal Island wharf to the Baltimore market.

In April the shipments changed to soft crabs from Wenona, at the bottom of the island, from Rock Creek (now called Chance), Dames Quarters and other Somerset County communities. Cans of picked crab meat, boxes of soft crabs iced down in seagrass, and baskets of steamed and live hard crabs piled up on the wharf every day.

Albert Anderson, who lived in Chance, (his father was the wharf's first agent for the BC&A) shared that he had seen as many as 500 boxes of soft crabs shipped from the wharf in one day. Sometimes it took a steamboat's six-man loading crew two hours to load.

Somerset County was once called the strawberry center of the world, and crates of berries were shipped out by the thousands. Tomatoes and beans were also

big local cash crops, and so were potatoes from the lower Virginia eastern shore.

Incoming cargoes were also heavy, for the Bay steamers brought in canned goods, fresh meats, fruits, clothing, tools, hardware and almost all the other necessities handled by our local stores.

All the supplies were ordered from traveling salesman (we called them drummers) who came and went by steamboat. They stayed at the Anderson Hotel, on shore near the wharf entrance. If the drummer needed a horse and rig to visit the island stores, "Miss May", who ran the hotel, would arrange it for him. Mrs. Anna Northam, my aunt, ran one of the island stores, and I loved to be there when any of the drummers who handled candy came to call. I would go into a sad face act. I must have been a fairly good actor, because usually I got a free candy or two from his big sample case.

The steamboat handled quite a bit of passenger traffic. One-way passage between Deal Island and Baltimore, as I recall, was \$3.50. If you wanted a state room (they were small but comfortable), you paid an extra \$1.50. Any meal you ate on the boat (meals as fine as I've ever eaten in any hotel at any price) cost well under a dollar.

The steamboats had an aura about them that is hard to describe. Maybe it was the stairways with big mirrors at the bottom, the plush chairs, the red carpet or all those shiny brass rails. Whatever, it gave you a feeling of being in an elegant world of travel and excitement.

There were two steamboat stops a day at Deal Island. The 4 pm boat came down from the Salisbury area, with stops at the Wicomico River wharves of Whitehaven, Nanticoke and Mount Vernon. The 9 pm boat came up from Crisfield after stops at

such Virginia communities as Onancock, Willis Wharf and Saxis Island. Our family lived at Wenona, at the south end of the island, and one of my early boyhood memories is of that 9 o'clock boat heading for the Deal Island wharf in the dark. With all its lights twinkling, it always reminded me of a big lit up beetle.

Buildings at the end of the wharf included a warehouse, waiting room, office and, at one time, an oyster packinghouse. In the early 1900's the southside post office was located there. As a night boat approached the wharf, Ralph Brown, the wharf agent would open the warehouse door and place a lighted lantern on each side to give the boat pilot a point to steer for. The warehouse was wired for electrical lighting, but had no power of its own. When the steam boat docked, crewmen would throw over a cable which connected the warehouse lighting system to the steamboat's electrical generator, and then there would be plenty of light for cargo handling.



Deal Island wharf in early 1920's. Capt. Johnnie Bennett on right, Anderson Hotel on left. Passing lane on right.

What passed for taxi service on Deal Island was Captain Johnnie Bennett's horse-drawn Dayton wagon. He hauled most of the steamboat's passengers to the end of the wharf. Before casting off, the steamboat skipper would always play his searchlight up

and down the wharf and its approach road to make sure he wasn't leaving anybody behind.

Moving cargo along the length of the wharf was sometimes a tricky business, for the wharf was so narrow. Two buggies could pass, but only by lifting hub over hub. Near the midway point of the wharf there was one wide section. A truck or freight wagon could pull off onto the bypass and allow another to pass. Otherwise, one of the vehicles would have to back up.

The Deal Island wharf was still thriving as it entered the 1930's, although business had begun to slow down a bit. A hard top road replaced the shell road between Princess Anne and the island, which allowed trucks to take over more and more of what had been steamboat cargo.

And then, in 1933, came the big hurricane which destroyed so many things around Deal Island. The storm weakened the wharf so much that trucks and wagons were no longer allowed on it. Steamboat freight had to be moved across the wharf only on hand trucks. The wharf was used in this way for a couple of years, and then abandoned.

There is hardly a trace left of the wharf now, or of the old Anderson Hotel. The look on the island has changed, but the wonderful memories of those old steamboating days will always remain with those of us who were part of them.

### COMMUNITY RECIPES

*The following recipes were excerpted from "Shore Fare", a book of favorite recipes compiled by the United Methodist Women of St. John's Methodist Church, 1982.*

**LITTLE BEAN SOUP** from Selena Webster  
1 lb. package navy or pea beans  
6 oz. slab bacon or seasoning meat  
1 small onion diced

2 tsp. salt., 1/8 tsp. pepper



Empty beans into container, pick out any bad beans. Cover with hot water and let stand five minutes. Drain off water. Wash again in very hot

water and drain off water, skins should be loosened with this washing. Cover beans with about 2 ½ quarts of hot water. Add seasoning meat, onion, salt and pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat 2 to 3 hours or until beans are tender and liquid is thickened. Season to taste.

### COMMUNITY NEWS

#### COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRIES

St. Paul's Church- Contact Pastor David Webster at 443-783-1007 (area churches combined pantry)

Deal Island Elementary School- Contact Principal Ashley Walters at 410-784-2449

#### DURABLE MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

The DI-C Lions Club assists in the provision of medical equipment to members of our community. All equipment is collected via donation. This service helps relieve the financial burden this type of purchase can bring. Donations are always accepted of items such as: wheelchairs, rollators and walkers, shower chairs and tub transfer benches, hospital beds, bedside commodes, wheelchair ramps, etc. Please contact Roy Ford at 410-422-0339 if you have a request for assistance or if you have any medical equipment to donate.

### NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS WANTED

Do you have a story to tell? A memory to share? An event of interest to the community? Please email: skipjackcommunitynews@gmail.com We want to hear from you!

### EASTER EGG HUNT

Deal Island Community, we need your help! We are accepting donations of individually-wrapped candy, plastic Easter eggs (large) and toys to be used as "special" egg prizes.

We also need volunteers to help fill eggs at St. John's Church Hall. Drop-in any days and times you can help between 12:00 - 4:00 p.m. on Monday through Friday, 3/18-3/22. Our goal remains 5,000 eggs for our community's children!

Donations of candy, eggs, toys and money can be dropped off to Shirley Massey, Shelley Webster or Carrie Day. Additionally, Deal Island School, St. John's Church and Rock Creek Church are drop-off points. We would like to have all donations by Monday, March 18.

Thank you for your help and support in providing another wonderful Easter Egg Hunt for our community's children.



### RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE PROJECT

Pull Together for the Ronald McDonald House in Baltimore! The 22B Lions Clubs are collecting pull tabs! You can help us in our efforts! We are inviting churches, organizations and individuals to collect pull tabs from soda, fruit and vegetable cans for the next several months. How can a pull tab help? We will combine all of the tabs collected and they will be weighed at a recycling center. The proceeds will then be given to the Ronald McDonald House who in turn will use the money to fuel their vans. For more information, visit [www.22blions.org](http://www.22blions.org) and click on district projects.

Please contact any member of the Deal Island-Chance Lions Club if you have tabs to donate.



### CARE PACKAGES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Area churches are collecting individually wrapped snacks to make care packages for our local college students to take back to school and have during finals. Please make donations to any area church by March 17<sup>th</sup>.





### SKIPJACK RUN

Registration is open for Skipjack Run 2024!

Saturday, September 7, 2024 7:30AM

<https://runsignup.com/Race/MD/DealIsland/SkipjackRunDealIsland>

5K (3.1 miles) OR 10K (6.2 miles) Walkers welcome! All proceeds support Deal Island Community Thanksgiving Dinner on Thanksgiving Day.



**St. John's Church**  
9883 Deal Island Rd.



For more information, please contact Carrie Day at [diclions58@gmail.com](mailto:diclions58@gmail.com) or 443-614-9926.



March  
23  
11:00 am

*Sandwiches*  
with chips & drink



\$15



Deal Island Fire Department  
10090 Deal Island Road, Deal Island, MD

# Virtual All-In Quarter Auction!

A Fundraiser benefitting the  
Deal Island- Chance Fire  
Company

1 for  
\$30



4 for  
\$100

**Saturday, March 16th @ 5:00 pm  
via Facebook Live**

Contact Tracy Horner @ 443-235-0554 to  
purchase a number or to make a prize donation.

PRIZES INCLUDE:  
GIFT CARDS  
CASH PRIZES  
GIFT BASKETS  
EVENT TICKETS  
AND LOTS MORE!

Proceeds benefit equipment upgrades and operational costs.

Any prizes not claimed within 30 days are considered  
forfeited.

Made with PosterMyWall.com

**Mermaids  
with Bonnie**

April 13, 2024  
10a-1p

\$25 per person

Rock Creek Church  
23580 Deal Island Road  
Chance, Maryland

To sign up, go to  
[socoarts.org](https://socoarts.org)

Deal Island- Chance Fire Company Club

**EASTER ORNAMENT  
TO-GO KITS**

\$10  
PER  
SET

INCLUDES:  
4 WOODEN  
ORNAMENTS, 6 PAINT  
PENS, AND STRING

Go to [socoarts.org](https://socoarts.org) to pre-purchase!

**Please Join Us for Senior**



**No Pre-Sale ♦ Purchase Entry at the Door  
Seniors (60+) ↔ \$5 To Play\***

**Saturday, April 20, 2024**

Deal Island-Chance Fire Department  
Doors Open at 4:00 p.m. - Games Begin at 5:00 p.m.

\*\$5 entry includes:  
6 Bingo Cards for each game,  
1 Bingo Card for each special game,  
1 Dabber and a Chance  
to win some awesome prizes!



--20 Regular Games  
--2 Special Games  
--50/50

**Concessions Will Be Available**

Any questions or to volunteer, please contact Carrie Day at 443-614-9926 or email [DICLIONSS8@GMAIL.COM](mailto:DICLIONSS8@GMAIL.COM)



COMMUNITY PHOTOS

RESIN BOARD WORKSHOP





LOVE DINNER

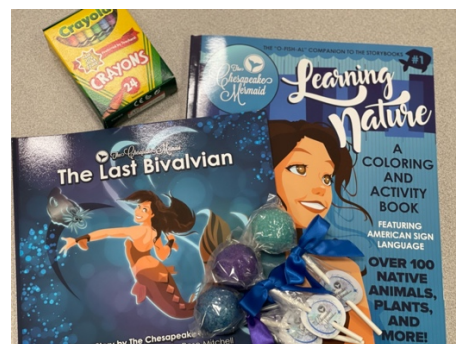






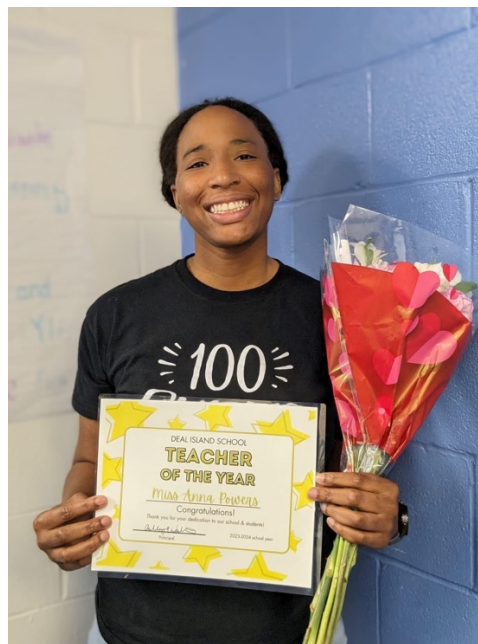


## CHESAPEAKE MERMAID VISIT TO DIS



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

3/2, 7:30 am-2 pm	Indoor Yard Sale at St. John's Church
3/2, 10 am-1 pm	Charcuterie Board Making Workshop at Rock Creek Church
3/16, 5:00 pm	DI-C Fire Dept. Virtual Quarter Auction on Facebook Live
3/23, 10:00 am	Easter Egg Hunt at St. John's Church (rain date 3/30)
3/23, 11:00 am	Oyster sandwich and hot dog sale at DI-C Firehouse
3/30, 7 am-10 am	DI-C Auxiliary Breakfast at Fire Department
3/31, 7:00 am	Free Easter Buffet after Sunrise Service at DI-C Fire Dept.
4/6, 7:30 am-2 pm	Indoor Yard Sale at St. John's Church
4/13, 10:00 am- 1:00 pm	Driftwood painting workshop (visit socoarts.org)
4/20, 5:00 pm	Senior Bingo at DI-C Firehouse, doors open at 4:30 pm
4/27, 7 am-10 am	DI-C Auxiliary Breakfast at Fire Department
5/11, 10 am-1 pm	Wreath making workshop (visit socoarts.org)



Deal Island School is blessed to have all amazing teachers. Congratulations to Ms. Anna Powers! The outstanding first grade teacher is the Deal Island School '23-'24 Teacher of the Year. She was selected to move on in the contest for County Teacher of the Year. Best of luck Ms. Powers!