**Ferries**

*Before bridges: For two centuries, Marylanders crossed shores by ship.*

*Baltimore Sun*, May 06, 2000, Frederick N. Rasmussen

Earlier this week, state transportation officials said they were considering activating a high-speed ferry route that would carry both passengers and vehicles from Southern Maryland across the Chesapeake Bay to the Lower Eastern Shore.

With the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in 1952, and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel in the 1960s, passenger and vehicular car ferries vanished from the bay.

Currently, the only passenger ferries plying the bay are those that call at Smith Island and Tangier Island, Va.

There were ferry boats on the bay as long ago as the 17th century, with one of the oldest and most heavily traveled routes being that from Rock Hall to Annapolis, 25 miles that in good weather could take two hours.

If the bay was kicking up, not an unknown condition, it could delay sailings for days.

It is also one of the most famous ferry routes in the nation.

Lt. Col. Tench Tilghman sailed on one of its boats in his mad dash from Yorktown to Philadelphia in 1781 to inform the Continental Congress of the defeat of Lord Cornwallis' forces at Yorktown.

George Washington was also a frequent patron of the bay ferries, having made his first crossing in 1757, and his last in 1791. Apart from a Rock Hall route run briefly in the early 1990s, the last ferry trips across the bay took place in 1952. Despite competition from the newly opened Bay Bridge, the boats of a half-century ago still managed to transport more than a million passengers a year.

It was a familiar ritual at either end of the 40-minute run as passengers and cars lined up and waited for such old and reliable boats as the *Gov. Harry W. Nice*, *Gov. Herbert R. O'Conor* or the *John M. Dennis*.

With a blast on their steam whistles and the churning up of bay water, the boats shoved off from their terminals, giving motorists a brief respite from hot highways, screaming children and traffic bound for Ocean City or Baltimore.

The boats ran 46 round trips between 5 a.m. and 2 a.m., and were only out of operation for refueling, cleaning and watering, which took two hours.

"But the ferryboat personnel knew their job -- over 90 percent of them were Eastern Shore watermen -- and in fog, snow, sleet and rain so hard a man could hardly see his
hand in front of his face, they `smelled' their way across the Bay and into their slips," said The Sunday Sun Magazine.

"Marylanders who used the ferries remember them fondly. Motorists enjoyed parking their cars on the main deck, then moving to the upper deck for coffee or a soft drink," observed the newspaper.

The final ferry run, which brought a colorful era in Maryland to an end, took place on New Year's Eve in 1952, when the Gov. Emerson C. Harrington II shuttled the four miles between Romancoke and Claiborne through a mixture of wind, rain and snow.

Frank Sherman, a 34-year veteran and purser on the boat, told a newspaper reporter that the "water ladies" had to give way to progress but a bridge isn't like a ferry.

"You can't come aboard, sit down and talk to your friends," Sherman told The Evening Sun.

The Gov. Herbert R. O'Conor, rechristened the Rhododendron, and the Gov. Harry W. Nice, renamed the Olympic, were sold by the State Roads Commission to Washington state where they were put on runs in the Puget Sound.

Almost half a century after leaving the waters of the Chesapeake, the Rhododendron, known affectionately as the "Rhody," still soldiers on. For ferryboat fans, she can be found daily steaming on the Fort Defiance to Tahlequah, Wash., route.

The Olympic has been withdrawn from service and sold to a new owner. She is now laid up at Eagle Harbor, Wash.

http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2000-05-06/features/0005060365_1_chesapeake-bay-bridge-ferry-boats-watermen
Chesapeake Bay Ferries

Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay region have a rich maritime heritage. Captain John Smith is said to have explored the lower Chesapeake Bay including Tangier Island and the lower part of the Eastern Shore of Virginia in 1608. Since that time, ships of all types have plied the hundreds of inlets, rivers and creeks of the Bay. Probably the most famous and largest of these were the ferries that were owned and operated by the Virginia Ferry Corporation and carried passengers and cars from Cape Charles and Kiptopeke Beach on the lower end of the Eastern Shore to Little Creek, Va located near Cape Henry, Va. Steamers were operated by the Pennsylvania Railroad to ferry freight and passengers between Baltimore, Md and Hampton Roads where trains would then provide the fastest means of moving between cities in the north and south. Prior to the 1940's, the only way for cars and trucks to reach Hampton Roads from the Eastern Shore was to go north through Maryland and then down the western shore of Virginia, a trip that would take two or three days. Following World War II, the Virginia Ferry Corporation began purchasing vessels that could be used to carry both passengers and vehicles across the 20 miles of open water at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. A total of seven ferries were built or purchased from the government and provided a valuable service to the people of the Eastern Shore of Virginia during the 1950's and 60's. The opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel in 1964 brought an end to the use of the ferries across the Chesapeake Bay. Some of the Virginia ferries were later used by the State of Delaware for the crossing between Cape May, N.J. and Lewis, Del. and remained in service until recently replaced by more modern vessels. A few of the smaller ferries ended their days as powered barges until they were deemed useless and were sold for scrap.
The Motor Vessel *Northampton* was a twin-screw diesel powered ship built in 1943 as LST #63 (Landing Ship Tank) for service during World War II. The Virginia Ferry Corporation purchased her in 1948. She was 316 Feet long and continued in service until 1964 when the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel was opened. The Northampton spent her last years serving as a barge with the Tidewater Towing Corp.

The *S.S. Delmarva* was built for the Virginia Ferry Corporation in 1933. Originally 249 Feet long, she was later cut in half and had an additional hull section added to give her a new length of 339 Feet. The Delmarva was powered by two steam engines and served on the Chesapeake Bay crossing until 1964 when she was sold to Delaware for service between Cape May, N.J. and Lewis, Del.

The *S.S. Princess Anne* was built in 1932 for the Virginia Ferry Corporation. Originally 246 Feet long, she was later cut in half and had an additional hull section added to give her a new length of 335 Feet. The Princess Anne was powered by two steam engines and served on the Chesapeake Bay crossing until 1964 when she was sold to Delaware for service between Cape May, N.J. and Lewis, Del.
The *S.S. Pocahontas* was built in 1941 for the Virginia Ferry Corporation. Originally 282 Feet long, she was later cut in half and had an additional hull section added to give her a new length of 358 Feet. The Pocahontas was powered by two steam engines and served on the Chesapeake Bay crossing until 1964 when she was sold to Delaware for service between Cape May, N.J. and Lewis, Del. At one time, the Pocahontas carried a flask containing earth taken from the grave of the Indian Princess Pocahontas in Saint George's Churchyard in Gravesend, England.

The *S.S. Accomac* began her career as the steamer Virginia Lee shortly after being built in 1928. She was purchased by the US Navy for service in World War II and sold to the Virginia Ferry Corporation in 1951. She was 291 Feet long, powered by twin steam engines, (later changed to diesels) and continued in service until 1964 when the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel was opened. The Accomac was being refitted in a Portsmouth shipyard in 1964 when she burned.

The Motor Vessel Old Point Comfort was a twin-screw diesel powered ship built in 1945 as LST #970 (Landing Ship Tank) for service during World War II. The Virginia Ferry Corporation purchased her in 1958 and she was converted for ferry service including having her stern modified for on/off loading of vehicles. She was 305 Feet long and continued in service until 1964 when the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel was opened.
The Old Point Comfort served on the Chesapeake Bay crossing until 1964 when she was sold to Delaware for service between Cape May, N.J. and Lewis, Del.

![Old Point Comfort](image)

The Motor Vessel *Virginia Beach* was a twin-screw diesel powered ship built in 1944 as LST #510 (Landing Ship Tank) for service during World War II. The Virginia Ferry Corporation purchased her in 1961. The Virginia Beach was converted for ferry service and had her stern modified for on/off loading of vehicles, as did the Old Point Comfort. She was 327 Feet long and continued in service until 1964 when the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel was opened.

![Motor Vessel Virginia Beach](image)

The Steamer *Virginia Lee* operated on the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and carried passengers between the ports of Cape Charles, Baltimore and Hampton Roads.

![Steamer Virginia Lee](image)

[http://www.esva.net/~rwest/ferries.html](http://www.esva.net/~rwest/ferries.html)

**Oxford Bellevue Ferry**

Established in 1683, the Oxford Bellevue Ferry, believed to be the nation's oldest privately operated ferry service, crosses the Tred Avon River between Oxford, Maryland and Bellevue, Maryland. Owned and operated by Tom and Judy Bixler- the ferry runs seven days a week from April to *November (*Nov-Saturday-Sunday only)

Steamship Ferries

The history of the Baltimore Steam Packet Co., on Chesapeake Bay is most interesting in that it is the only steamboat company now [1947] in operation; the other companies have long ceased to exist, with the possible exception of the Toichester Excursion Line. The Baltimore Steam Packet Co. was chartered in December 1839, Andrew F. Henderson becoming its first President. As this book is intended to represent the side-wheelers in my day to the time of their disappearance from the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, we will continue its history from that time (1878). The Florida was the first of these vessels and was built about this time by Wm. Skiuner & Sons of Baltimore. The Carolina, an iron steamer, followed in 1877, built by Harlan & Hollingsworth. Her speed was about 18 miles an hour, which was considered very fast time for a steamboat in those days: as a matter of fact, there were not many at a later date that could do any better. The Virginia, a sister ship, followed two years later.

The Tolchester Company was formed in 1877 and acquired the Pilot Boy (1857, 161 ft.) from the Delaware Bay to initiate and run excursions to Tolchester Beach. The Sarah Taggart (1875, 151 ft.) was added the next year and retained for a short time.
In 1881 the *Nelly White* was bought. In 1885 the *Louise* was bought and rebuilt.

The Company started the Little Choptank River run in 1882 with *Pilot Boy* and around 1888 it purchased from the Md. Steamboat Co., its Annapolis and West River wharves. The Company built the *Emma Giles* in 1887 and in 1889 purchased the *Samuel L. Felton*, (1866 202 ft.) which was renamed *Tolchester*.

The Eastern Shore Steamboat Company was formed in 1867. The Company initiated service to Crisfield, Pocomoke and Occahannock Rivers. It built the *Sue*, *Maggie*, *Helen*, *Tangier, Eastern Shore* and *Pocomoke*. The Sue was sold in 1872. In 1894, the Company was bought out by the Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic Railway Co.

The Maryland Steamboat Company was formed in 1867 from the former Individual Enterprise Steamboat Company. The Company operated to the Choptank River, Miles River and also ran excursions to Annapolis as well as to Holly Grove. The company built
the *Ida* in 1881 and her sister *Avalon* in 1882. In 1894 the Maryland Steamboat Co. was bought out by the Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic Ry. Co. The Company built the *Tivoli* in 1894, *Maryland* in 1903 and her sister *Virginia* in 1903.

In 1904 another company was formed, known as the Maryland, Delaware & Virginia Steamboat Co., which also took over the Chester River Steamboat Co. and the Weems Line and with the B. C. & A. Ry. under the same control, operated a fleet of 35 steamers.


In 1916 the General Assembly of Maryland passed an Act authorizing the State Roads Commission to establish a ferry system between Claiborne and Annapolis. In 1919 that Claiborne-Annapolis Ferry, Inc. acquired a ferryboat and named it the *Governor Emerson C. Harsington*, in honor of the then Governor of the State.

Thus ferry service was inaugurated for the transportation of motor vehicles, freight and passenger service across the Bay between Claiborne and Annapolis. This vessel could carry at least 35 motor vehicles and they were loaded from the side. The distance across was 19.63 nautical miles, or approximately 23 land miles. The time of each crossing was 1 hour and 30 minutes.

*Steamer Thomas Patten renamed the Governor Emerson C. Harsington*

Old Bay Line
On March 18, 1840, a bill passed the House incorporating the Baltimore Steam Packet Company, nicknamed the Old Bay Line. The steamboat line provided services on the Chesapeake Bay, primarily between Baltimore and Norfolk, Va. When it closed in 1962 after 122 years of existence, it was the last surviving overnight steamship passenger service in the United States.

Other cities serviced by the line were Washington, D.C., Old Point Comfort, and Richmond, Va. One of the Old Bay Line’s steamers, the former *President Warfield*, later became famous as the Exodus ship of book and movie fame, when Jewish refugees from war-torn Europe sailed aboard her in 1947 in an unsuccessful attempt to emigrate to Palestine.
Hydrofoils & Chesapeake Ferries

Non-traditional transportation solutions have been growing, driven by increasing energy costs and emissions constraints, and water transportation itself is increasingly seen as part of the solution to land transportation problems. A ship or ferry may offer a shorter direct route or relieve congested highways by means of parallel water routes.

New technologies receive much attention, but some that have been around awhile are particularly relevant now. The hydrofoil is a prime example. It can substantially reduce the power and fuel consumption to make a respectable speed and can still be highly cost-effective.

Maritime Applied Physics Corporation (MAPC) has been developing new passenger hydrofoil designs and has also done the groundwork for some specific ferry routes on the Chesapeake Bay.

According to Mark Rice, MAPC President, viable small high-speed (35-50 knots) passenger vessel frequent service routes include:
– Rock Hall/Tolchester – Baltimore – Annapolis
– Matapeke - Baltimore
– St Michaels – Annapolis - Baltimore
– Cambridge – Annapolis
– Shady Side – Annapolis
– Aberdeen – Baltimore – Betterton
– Solomons - Honga

Market discriminator for Baltimore port cities (Baltimore, Annapolis, Cambridge, etc.)
  – Commuters
  – Tourism
Smart Growth Development opportunities in Bay communities
  – Fosters alternative and intermodal transportation
  – Creates investment in town centers
  – Fosters Appropriate Economic development in small communities
No expensive infrastructure required
Energy efficient
Flexible solution – not tied to road or bridge investments
  – Routes can be changed
  – Magnitude can be altered
Enables travel on the John Smith Waterway

http://www.foils.org/01_Mtg_Pres%20dnloads/100311%20IHS%20diner%20mtg/100311MarkRiceMAPPIHS.pdf