Survey No. T-541

Magi No.

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

DOE __yes _x no

CHESAPEAKE BAY SKIPJACK FLEET THEMATIC GROUP

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historic	RUBY G. FO	ORD				·,·	
and/or comm		<u> </u>					·
2. Lo	cation						
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city, town	Tilghman		n/a_ vicinity of	co	ongressional	district	First
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3. Cla	assificat	ion					
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6. Re	presenta	ation i	n Existing	g Hi	storica	l Surv	eys
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date 19	83-1983			-	federal	state	e county loca
depository fo	r survey records	Marylan	d Historical Tr	rust, 2	l State (Circle	
city, town	Annapo1	is	A Company of the Comp		-	state	ID 21401

7. Description

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Condition								
	excellent							
<u>X</u>	good							

__ fair

___ deteriorated

. unexposed

Check one
____ unaitered
__X altered

Check one $\frac{n/a}{}$ original site

___ moved date of move

n/a

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

This vessel is a 45' long, two-sail bateau, or V-bottomed deadrise type of centerboard sloop, commonly referred to as a skipjack. She is built in Bay fashion using cross-planked construction, has a beam of 15.6', a depth of 2.6', and a net tonnage of 5 register tons. She was built in 1891 in Fairmount, Maryland, making her among the oldest vessels in the oyster dredging fleet. She has oak frames and local pine planking. She carries a typical skipjack rigarib-headed mainsail laced to the boom and carried on wooden hoops at the mast, and a single large jib with a shart club on its foot. The vessel is painted white.

In shape, the vessel has a longhead bow and a square, or transom, stern. She has little freeboard, riding low in the water; her low sides permit easier handling of the dredges. The longhead bow has a sharp, raking, clipper-like stem and a hexagonal bowsprit, which coes not follow the upturn of the sheer but is led out parallel to the waterline. The transom stern is relatively flat, showing little rake, and is well "tucked," or lifted out of the water at the corners of the chine. The rudder is carried outboard, on pintles mounted on the transom and skeg.

The vessel is flush-decked. From the stern forward deck structures include: a box over the steering gear aft, on which the white-painted wheel is mounted; a cabin trunk with a sliding hatch cover, or slide, providing access to the main cabin below; a small hatch; a box built over the winders; and a main deck hatch just abaft the mast. She is fitted out for oystering with rollers mounted on either rail at the main deck work area, winders, dredges, and a motorized pushboat mounted on davits at the stern.

The mast shows a rake of about 15° to 20° aft. It is set up with double shrouds and deadeyes, with other standing rigging including a forestay, jibstay, and topping lift. The long boom is jawed to the mast and carried very low; it bows up at the after-end. The bowsprit is set up with two bowsprit shrouds and two bobstays of chain and cable. The jib is self-tending, with a galvanized iron horse set across the foredeck to control it as the boat tacks. Both mainsail and jib are fitted with lazyjacks for easier furling.

Decoration includes trailboards mounted on the longhead with the name RUBY G. FORD incised within a red lozenge on a blue background decorated with vines and leaves in darker red and green, and flags and a shield painted in red, white, and blue.

8. Significance

Survey No. T-541

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check:	Appl:	nd/or icable	Criteria: Exception: gnificance	A	B	c	D			G	<u>X</u>	none	

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

This vessel is significant as being one of the 35 surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and a member of the last commercial sailing fleet in the United States. 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.

The skipjack evolved as a distinct type of Bay vessel in the 1890's as a cheaper-to-construct alternative to the earlier bugeyes and other traditional framed craft, in a period when shipbuilding costs were rising and the oyster catch was diminishing. The type was devised by enlarging (to 25 to 60 feet) the hull of the ordinary, unframed, square-sterned Bay crabbing skiff, and giving it a deadrise bottom, a-deck, a cabin, and a sloop rig. The result—with its unframed, hard chine, cross-planked, 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.

The Maryland oyster season begins November 1 and ends March 15. Skipjacks must dredge under sail on all days except Mondays and Tuesdays, when they are allowed to use their motorized pushboat for dredging. The pushboat, normally carried on davits at the stern, is lowered into the water and literally "pushes" the skipjack along from behind, the nose of the pushboat resting against a "jig" on the stern of the skipjack. The pushboat can also legally be used to get the skipjack to and from the oyster beds each day. Each skipjack's crew is made up of the captain, who is often also the owner, and five crew members.

RUBY G. FORD is of particular interest and importance as being the oldest skipjack in the dredging fleet. She was built in 1891 in Fairmount, Maryland following traditional Bayarea design and construction methods. She has worked in the oyster-dredging fleet since her building, mainly out of Smith Island, but has been based at Tilghman since the late 1960s. The vessel is one of the 21 surviving working skipjacks to have been built previous to 1912 and one of only two vessels built before 1900. RUBY G. FORD was listed in earlier years as schooner-rigged and may have been a so-called three-sail bateau with a bugeye rig. According to local legend, RUBY G. FORD is the 1st boat to be known as a "skipjack" instead of an "oyster-dredging bateau."

See Thematic Group nomination cover form, Continuation Sheets No. 8-13.

10. G	eographi	cal Data		•	
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11. Fo	rm Prepa	ered By			
name/title	Anne Witty/	M. E. Haywar	đ		
organization	Radcliffe Ma Maryland Hi	ritime Museum storical Soci	ety da	te May, 198	4
street & numbe	er 201 West M	onument Stree	t te	ephone (301)	685-3750
ity or town	Baltimore		st	ate Maryland	21201

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to:

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