

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

CHESAPEAKE BAY SAILING LOG CANOE FLEET THEMATIC GROUP

AUG 5 1985
SEP 18 1985

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic ISLAND BIRD

and/or common log canoe

2. Location

street & number Miles River Yacht Club n/a not for publication

city, town St. Michaels vicinity of congressional district First

state Maryland 024 county Talbot 041

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name John C. North

street & number P.O. Box 479 telephone no.: 822-6378

city, town Easton state and zip code Maryland 21601

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. n/a liber

street & number folio

city, town state

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records 21 State Circle

city, town Annapolis state Maryland 21401

7. Description

Survey No. T-502

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

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

ISLAND BIRD is a 27'4" sailing log canoe with a racing rig, a sharp stem with a longhead bow, and a sharp, raking stern. Log-built, she is one of the smallest boats in the active racing fleet, with a beam of only 5'6 1/2". The canoe was built in 1882 in Tilghman, Maryland by William Sidney Covington, one of the most noted of the early racing canoe builders. The boat is privately owned by his descendants and has been racing every season since 1949. She has a white hull and a distinctive white kite with an osprey on it.

The canoe has typical Tilghman-style log construction, with carvel-fitted rising planks and a smooth sheer with no sheer rails. There are half frames and sawn hanging knees supporting her washboards, which form a half-deck and carry short cleat rails midships. The sharp stem has a modified longhead. A short entry leads to a long run with a long, sharp, raking stern on which the rudder is hung outboard on pintles. A short bumpkin with a solid wooden backrest overhangs the stern. The canoe has a centerboard placed well forward and carries springboards for racing. There are solid stern sheets aft of the mainmast step and thwart.

The rig consists of two unstayed masts--a 36' foremast and a 25' mainmast--carrying a mainsail, foresail, and jib. These are set into square chocks in thwarts. The bowsprit, curved down towards the water, is set up with standing rigging--a bobstay and two shrouds as well as wooden braces on the longhead--which counteract the force of the large jib. The main sails have clubs and sprits and the jib has a club on its foot. ISLAND BIRD carries among her light racing sails a distinctive kite with an osprey.

The canoe is half-decked with a squared-off foredeck and wide washboards painted light green, lined with a white coaming. When not set up the masts are carried on trestles in the cockpit, as is other racing gear. The hull is glassed over and painted white, with the name ISLAND BIRD in black letters on the hull. Her longhead is painted white and is undecorated, but carries the ends of wooden braces leading aft to the hull.

8. Significance

Survey No. T-502

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1882 **Builder/Architect** William Sidney Covington

check: Applicable Criteria: A B C D
and/or

Applicable Exception: A B C D E F G none

Level of Significance: national state local

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

This vessel is significant as being one of the last surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay racing log canoes that carry on a tradition of racing on the Eastern Shore of Maryland that has existed since the 1840's. In addition, it is a surviving representative of the oldest indigenous type of boat on the Bay--the working log canoe--which was developed in the 17th century by early European settlers from the aboriginal dugout canoe.

Used for transportation and for harvesting the rich bounty of the Bay, log canoes changed little over the centuries. Constructed of from two to seven logs and ranging in length from 20 to 35 feet, they were rigged with one or two sharp-headed spritsails with or without a jib set on raking, unstayed pole masts. Easily and cheaply constructed, some 6300 existed in Bay waters in the 1880s. The working canoes first began to be raced in 1840 and by the 1870s area boatbuilders were building canoes specifically for racing, with lighter, thinner hulls and sharper lines. As mast heights increased to increase sail area the canoes became inherently unstable, necessitating the use of springboards and human ballast. Also part of the racing rig is the outrigger, added for balance and to enable the sail tender to sit beyond the overlarge mainsail.

With the invention of the gasoline engine many log canoes were converted to power for oystering, but were then converted back to sail as interest in racing waxed and waned over the years. After peak years of popularity in the 1880s and 1890s, interest in log canoe racing waned in the first two decades of the 20th century only to be revived again in the 1920s. The popularity of racing, spearheaded by the Miles River Yacht Club, continued unabated until the present day, although the number of vessels active in the fleet has varied considerably.

ISLAND BIRD is especially significant as being the oldest surviving member of the racing log canoe fleet, having been built by William Sidney Covington of Tilghman, Maryland in 1882. At 27'4" long she is also one of the smallest in the fleet and is built of only 3 logs instead of the more usual 5. Covington was a noted builder of log canoes in the 1880s and 1890s, being the builder of the famed "Island" group--the ISLAND BIRD, ISLAND BRIDE, ISLAND BELLE, ISLAND BEAUTY, AND ISLAND BLOSSOM, only two of which still survive today. One of the two major annual log canoe races is named in his honor and is for boats built before 1917.

The names of the original owners of ISLAND BIRD have been lost, but she was acquired in the late 1920's by J.H. Caulk Kemp of St. Michaels. In the 1930's a friend of Kemp's

(continued overleaf)

commissioned the well known naval architect Phillip Rhodes to design a modernized rig but to preserve the original sail plan. This resulted in two oval shaped hollow masts and laminated box-section sprits constructed to conform to the shape of the sails. With new sails made by a New York sailmaker from the finest Egyptian cotton, ISLAND BIRD began to win her share of races.

In 1949 ISLAND BIRD was bought by Judge John C. North of Easton, grandson of the builder William S. Covington. At that time the vessel was extensively rebuilt by North and his son, John C. North II. She has competed in every Miles River Yacht Club race since except for 1967 when a large section of her hull was discovered to be soft due to water trapped under the fiberglass coating. Treatment with a chemical product proved successful.

The history of ISLAND BIRD and her connection with the family of her builder is an awesome testament to the long-standing traditions of building and racing log canoes in the St. Michaels area. In many races over the course of the past 15 years the vessel has carried three generations of the North family as crew and is today still owned by a member of the family and direct descendant of the builder, who has in his possession the original builder's model of the canoe. A lines drawing, taken from this half model, was published in Yachting Magazine, August, 1936.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Brewington, Marion V., Chesapeake Bay Log Canoes and Bugeyes (Cambridge, Md.: Cornell Maritime Press, 1963)

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name St. Michaels, MD

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	8	3	9	4	1	0	0	4	2	9	5	0	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The historic boundary of this movable vessel is co-terminous with the hull. The vessel is usually stored at the location indicated in Item 2.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
n/a			

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Witty and Dr. Mary Ellen Hayward

organization Maryland Historical Society

date May 1984

street & number 201 West Monument Street

telephone (301) 685-3750

city or town Baltimore

state 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: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438