

FISHING VESSEL *LOLA CATHERINE*
Bushwood
St. Mary's County
Maryland

HAER MD-176
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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FISHING VESSEL *LOLA CATHERINE*

HAER No. MD-176

Location: Potomac River, Bushwood, St. Mary's County, Maryland

Date of Construction: 1977

Rig/Type of Craft: Chesapeake Deadrise or Potomac Dory

Trade: Fishing (oyster tonging / crabbing / trotlining / crab-potting)

Official Number: 583254

Principle Dimensions: Length: 32'-8"; Beam: 10'-5"; Depth: 2'-7"

Designer/Builder: Charles David Lawrence

Original Owner: Peter B. Grosky

Present Owner: Mathew B. Oliver

Present Use: Fishing (crabbing)

Significance: Fishing Vessel (F/V) *Lola Catherine* is a representative example of the wooden boat-building tradition in southern Maryland. The design and construction reflect an evolution of tradition from nineteenth-century Potomac Dory boats adapted to support larger engines and higher speeds.

Description:

F/V *Lola Catherine* is constructed of wood in the Chesapeake Deadrise style, but maintains some heritage with the Potomac Dory type. Frames are sided 2", molded 3", and spaced approximately 18" on center. Frames are flared in the forward sections to prevent spray. Deck Knees are located at frames 10, 13, 16, and 19. Floor Knees are located at frames 11 and 14. The hull is planked fore and aft with a hard chine, but there is no chine log. The Keel has a maximum width of 7". A skeg extends from the bottom and tapers down towards the stern to support the propeller shaft and rudder. The pilothouse is placed forward on the boat and includes a small dinette and workbench. There is a cuddy space under the foredeck for storage. The current engine is a Caterpillar 3160 Marine diesel with v-drive housed in a plywood box. A secondary helm station with steering stick is located on the starboard side near the engine box and crab-pot puller. There is a wide side deck and low freeboard for working oyster tongs and crab pots. With the decline in the oyster industry, the boat has been used mainly for crabbing, trotlining and crab-potting. The winder on the starboard quarter would have been fitted later in

this vessel's career. It is more commonly called a crab-pot puller, although the same device, modified, is also used as a trotline winder. The crab-pot puller is angled at about 45 degrees, as this one appears to be, whereas when used with a trotline, the two round plates above and below the line are aligned horizontally.

History:

The 30' deadrise workboat *Lola Catherine* was built in 1977 by one of the most prolific wooden boatbuilders in Southern Maryland, Charles David Lawrence, on Canoe Neck Creek, in St. Mary's County, Maryland. "Davey" Lawrence, as he is known, was born in 1928 at River Springs, St. Mary's, and is descended from several old county families. He now lives on his grandparents' former property on Canoe Neck Creek. The current carport of his house formed part of his last boatshop, where he built his final boat around 1983, a 32'-footer, using "finishing-up" lumber.

Lawrence began building early in life at the age of 10 or 11 when he built a skiff using boards from his father's tobacco barn (he later sold the boat for a dollar). Like most of his contemporaries, he was self-taught and never used plans; he knew in his mind what the boat would look like before he even started building. Boatbuilding started off as more of a hobby after he was discharged from the military in 1946, but quickly grew in scale. By his own estimate, Lawrence built about 1,700 boats during his career, many of them being cross-planked skiffs. He once built sixty-nine, 18' skiffs in one year for a customer in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The 18' skiffs were his favorite boat to build. He could build one a day and sell them for \$125 apiece. They could carry twenty-five bushels of oysters with a 60-horsepower engine, and many were sold to watermen.

All of Lawrence's boats were of his own design. The larger ones were planked lengthwise on the bottom, as he believed this made for a stronger boat. In this, he remained true to the boatbuilding traditions of the Seventh District of St. Mary's County where the majority of builders constructed deadrise or V-bottom boats with the bottom planking running lengthwise, or fore-and-aft. The most common type of boat produced in this style was the Potomac River doryboat. Builders in the area stuck to this method long after most of their contemporaries on the Chesapeake Bay had switched to cross-planking.

Lawrence took this tradition and produced a variation of the box-stern dory with more of an angled bow and greater flare. Except for the butt joints and garboard strakes, his boats were built without caulking, as Lawrence believed caulking retained moisture and promoted rot. His steam box, used for softening planks prior to bending in place, was made from 55-gallon drums cut in half and laid end-to-end. All boats were built right way up or "on their feet."

In the early 1950s, Lawrence built a house and shop off Morris Point Road in Abell. In 1958 he bought a marina on St. Patrick Creek (currently Cather Marine), where he built about 130 boats a year. He built his last shop on Canoe Neck Creek around 1967. That year he and his family packed up and moved to Florida but returned before the year was out. He went on to

build about 300 boats of various sizes at this site, including the *Lola Catherine*. He also installed a marine railway using rails from the former railroad that ran to Lexington Park. After he stopped building, the boatshop was converted into a home and the railway removed about 1983. All trace of the former boatyard has now disappeared.

The largest boat Lawrence built was the 45' *Antonia*, now the *Gerry C* (1975). Another well-known boat still working is the 44' *workboat Frisky* (1976), a larger version of the 30' *Lola Catherine*. Both *Frisky* and *Lola Catherine* were among fifteen to twenty of this type that were built, although most were larger than the *Lola Catherine*.

After completion in 1977, the *Lola Catherine* was bought by Peter B. Grosky, a St. Mary's seafood dealer, and named *Siony G*. She was originally powered by a 455 Oldsmobile engine with a V-drive, and rigged for oyster patent-tonging. In her heyday, she could carry about 125 bushels of oysters. She changed hands in 1983 and was renamed the *Barbara Jean*. In 1990 she was sold again, to Charles F. and Melissa L. Morris, and passed through various members of the Morris family of St. Mary's County until 2009. She retained the name *Barbara Jean* until 2004, when she became the *Lola Catherine*. For most of the time when owned by the Morris family she was used mainly for crabbing. Her current hailing port is Bushwood, Maryland.

Lola Catherine is an excellent example of the variety of wooden boats built in St. Mary's County during the second half of the twentieth century. It was a time when the seafood industry was experiencing relative prosperity and there was a demand for wooden boats, particularly for oystering. The boat also represents a style of construction that was limited almost exclusively on the Chesapeake Bay during this period to the Seventh District of St. Mary's County. The boat continues to make a living today in the same area where she was created in 1977.

Sources:

Interviews with the builder (Charles David Lawrence of Abell, Maryland) and present owner (William S. Morris, Jr. of Bushwood, Maryland).

Historian: Data compiled by Richard Dodds, 2009

Project Information:

The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) is a long-range program that documents and interprets historically significant engineering sites and structures throughout the United States. HAER is part of Heritage Documentation Programs (Richard O'Connor, Manager), a division of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The HAER Maritime Program is managed by Todd Croteau, HAER Architect. The Southern Maryland Boat Builders project was funded in 2009 by the Calvert Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland. The historical data was prepared by Richard Dodds, Curator of the Calvert Marine Museum. Drawings and large-format photographs were prepared by Todd A. Croteau. George Sargent, Calvert Marine Museum, assisted with fieldwork.

Figure Pages: Photographs provided by field team.

Figure 1: Charles David Lawrence, 2009



Figure 2: Aerial view of Lawrence's shop and railway at Canoe Neck Creek, ca. 1970s.



Figure 3: F/V *Lola Catherine* in the water at River Springs Landing, 2006.

