

VLR 0/1/5
NHP 10/4/5

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Elva C., Deck Boat

other names/site number DHR File Number: 066-5048

2. Location

street & number 504 Main Street, P. O. Box 306 not for publication N/A
city or town Reedville vicinity _____
state Virginia code VA county Northumberland code 133 Zip 22539

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 _____ 9/25/05
Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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Elva C.
Reedville, Northumberland Co., VA

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

other - 20th Century Chesapeake Bay Deck Boat

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____

roof _____

walls _____

other Wood, Metal, Diesel Engine

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation; Engineering/Architecture

Period of Significance 1922-1955

Significant Dates 1922

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Gilbert White

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Reedville Fishermen's Museum

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
18	387706	4189068	2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Wendell G. Haynie, Updated by Register Program Specialist at DHR Jean McRae

Organization: Reedville Fishermen's Museum date 2/15/05, Updated August 2005

street & number: 504 Main Street telephone 804-453-6529

city or town Reedville state VA zip code 22539

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Reedville Fishermen's Museum

street & number 504 Main Street, P. O. Box 306 telephone 804-453-6529

city or town Reedville state VA zip code 22539

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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7. Summary Description and Glossary

Summary Description

Elva C. is a typical Chesapeake Bay deck boat with cross-plank construction. Her chunk stern is atypical, but a hallmark of the boat's builder.

Statistics for the *Elva C.* are as follows:

- Length overall 55.5 feet
- Beam: 13.5 feet
- Draft: 3.7 feet
- Tonnage: 16 gross tons, 9 net tons
- Official Number: #222481

Between construction in 1922 and retirement in 1995, this boat had three owners. She worked both in fish trapping and in hauling. At one time, she hauled watermelons from North Carolina to Baltimore. Her current owner is the Reedville Fisherman's Museum in Reedville, Virginia, and she lies in Cockrell's Creek, adjoining the Museum's property, on display for educational purposes. Portions of the *Elva C.* -- bow stem, deck beams, planking, gunwales, and stern -- have been accurately reconstructed and a rebuilt engine and new steering wheel (previous owner kept as memento) were installed. Restoration begun in 1995 has made her once again a strong and sturdy little boat, capable of cruising throughout the Chesapeake Bay as she did more than seventy years ago.

Detailed Description

The following description of the *Elva C.* proceeds in order, from her stem to her stern. The final description is of her hull features.

Stem

Typical of deck boats, the *Elva C.* has a raked stem. The angle of bow to water is approximately seven to ten degrees.

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Mooring Bit

The double mooring bit on the *Elva C.* runs through her deck down to her keelson.

Entrance to Fo'c'sle

Both food and shelter were available in the cabin in the forward part of the boat, or fo'c'sle. The galley, where meals were prepared, was situated here. The stove on which meals were cooked also provided welcome heat for crew members who were working in cold weather. In some deck boats, there was some space for crew to sleep. Sleeping space on the *Elva C.* is limited to two V-berths. Obviously, larger boats could accommodate additional sleeping quarters. The top of the forward cabin rises eighteen inches above its deck. Three portholes provide light and ventilation for the boat.

Mast

The *Elva C.*'s mast is heart pine, and rises approximately 32 feet above deck. It is mounted in the keelson, and held in place by two sets of stays. Mounted on the mast is the navigation light. A boom, used as a derrick, is fitted at the bottom of the mast. It was used for handling cargo and for raising nets. Blocks and tackles at the tip of the boom are used to position the boom and for hoisting cargo.

Fish Hold

On deck boats, the purpose of the below-deck fish hold was to keep cargo, whether it was fish or freight. The hold of the *Elva C.* was used for both at different times during her life. The opening of the fish hold is 58 inches X 184 inches, and the dimensions of the fish hold itself are approximately 20 feet by 12 feet by 3 feet. At deck level, there are seven hatch covers that can be opened and closed as needed. The hold is extended 14 inches above deck, surrounding the fish hold and serves to keep water out of the hold and to increase the loading capacity of the boat. The fish hold encompasses the sides of the boat and the forward and rear bulkheads. The bulkheads provide water-tight integrity to the hold. The aft bulkhead separates the fish hold from the engine room.

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Engine Room

This same bulkhead, lying forward of the engine room, separates it from the fish hold. The engine room runs below deck, from the bulkhead to partway under the wheelhouse. It is an unusually large room, built to accommodate a large engine. There is a single entrance to the engine room, and a sliding hatch cover and three portholes for ventilation. Contained within the engine room is all the mechanical components of the boat, including the engine, pumps, batteries, fuel tank, and other equipment. The engine is a Ford Lehman diesel, 120 horsepower.

Wheelhouse

The wheelhouse is used to house the navigation and steering equipment, as well as to provide shelter and sleeping quarters for the crew. On the *Elva C.*, it also has a large exhaust pipe that runs from the floor of the wheelhouse through the ceiling. Even though it is wrapped with insulation, the pipe nevertheless warms the wheelhouse. In cold weather, it is a particularly appealing location. The wheelhouse also has five windows for ventilation in warmer times. The last owners of the *Elva C.*, the Swift family, chose to keep its wheel as a memento of their ownership. Thus, the wheel now on her is all new, and is actually superior to the original. It was made by one of the museum volunteers who helped in the restoration. The instrument panel on her is to the starboard of the steering wheel, and the gearshift mechanism is aft of the wheel.

Stern

Elva C.'s stern is her most unique feature, and many say one of her prettiest. It is a chunk stern, that is, curved, irregularly-shaped planks are wrapped around the stern horizontally, then rounded with an adz. This method of construction was unique to Gilbert White, her builder. During the restoration process, volunteer workers removed each of the oddly-shaped planks, numbered them according to their original position, replicated them out of new wood using the old pieces as templates, and then put the whole back together (Jett). There is a single bit in the stern.

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Hull

The hull configuration of the *Elva C.* is typical of the Chesapeake Bay deck boats, with a cross-plank, deadrise hull construction. Its lofted, raised stern conforms to the shape of the horn timber. Her chine is a single, hard construction chine. The ribs are fastened to the chine at the lower side plank. The wood in the hull is heart pine from Georgia.

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Glossary

Adz. A hand tool used by deck boat builders for shaping wood. One of the oldest boatbuilding tools, it has an arching blade connected to a wooden handle.

Block and Tackle. A combination of ropes and pulleys used to increase the mechanical advantage needed to hoist loads.

Boom. A spar attached to the base of the mast.

Bow. The forward end of a boat.

Bulkhead. A vertical partition that divides the hull into separate compartments.

Chine. The fore-and-aft timber that connects and supports the bottom and side planking on a deadrise hull.

Chunk stern. A round stern on a deck boat and a smaller deadrise workboat. Made from chunks of wood that are layered so the seams on a layer are covered by the chunk of wood above it.

Cross-planked. Bottom planking that is fastened athwart-ships from keel to chine.

Deadrise. A straight rise from the keel to the chine.

Deck boat. A generic term for wooden Chesapeake Bay vessels with decks fore and aft, and a mast and boom forward of a house and pilothouse.

Draketail stern. Several deck boats had draketail sterns. Maryland boat builders came up with the Hooper Island draketail by modeling the stern after early twentieth-century racing launches and torpedo boats. The draketail stern has a reverse rake, as well as a chine that follows the waterline throughout the length of the boat.

Fish trap. A pound net. George Snediker of Gravesend, Long Island, introduced the pound net to the Chesapeake region about 1870. It is a stationary fish net consisting of poles and nets.

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Fo'c'sle. The cabin in the forward part of the boat.

Hatch. An opening in the boat's deck for loading and unloading cargo.

Hold. Area below deck where cargo is carried.

Hull. The main body of a boat, not including the cabin and pilot house.

Keelson. A stringer that runs down the keel inside the hull to provide additional strength. The bottom boards are nailed under the keelson.

Mast. Wood or metal pole that supports booms, gaffs, and gear for carrying sails. Used on deck boats to hoist seafood up onto deck and to off-load it to shore. In the early years of motor-powered deck boats it was used to carry an auxiliary sail.

Mooring bit. Same as Samson post.

Pound net. A stationary arrangement of netting used to harvest fish. It was introduced to the Chesapeake region in 1858 and became widely used in the area.

Rake. The angle of the stem line, stem post, or mast in relation to the keel

Ribs. Frames or timber of a boat that rise from the keel to form the shape of the hull.

Samson post. A large timber that runs from the keelson through the deck. The Samson post is a secure station from which the boat can be towed, anchored, or secured to a mooring.

Stay. The rigging of a boat that supports the mast.

Stem. The upright beam at the bow.

Stern. The after end of the boat.

Wheelhouse. The deckhouse of a vessel in which the stern wheel is located.

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8. Statement of Significance

Summary Statement of Significance

The *Elva C.*, built in 1922, is a typical wooden Chesapeake Bay deck boat built by Gilbert White, one of Virginia's best known deck boat builders. In the early twentieth century, before the advent of a transportation system in this country, deck boats served the people of the Chesapeake Bay region much as automobiles, trucks, and railroads do today. As with the vehicles used today, deck boats all followed certain general design principles, but varied in specific details according to use. Nothing illustrates these variations more than the many names by which deck boats are known. As "deck boats," fishermen used them to bring their oysters, fish and crabs to markets. In Virginia, which had fewer regulations than Maryland concerning the harvesting of oysters and crabs, they were used as dredge boats. As "buyboats," "freight boats," "Bay freighters," or "packet boats," the boats were used by merchants to haul freight, including raw products, processed products, and food. Boats making regular trips for certain products were "runners," a category that included liquor runs during Prohibition.

Criteria Statement

The *Elva C.* is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A (Transportation) and C (Engineering/Architecture) as an excellent example of a wooden Chesapeake Bay deck boat with individual details such as the chunk stern, a hallmark of builder Gilbert White. Deck boats served an important role in the Bay region in the early 20th century in the transportation of freight and food products as well as for the delivery of oysters, fish and crabs to market. Deck boats were important to Reedville in the menhaden fishing industry. This industry was, and is, vital to Reedville, and was responsible for Reedville's ranking in the early 1900's as a wealthy city. Although many deck boats once plied the Chesapeake Bay area, the upkeep required for wooden boats has resulted in the loss of many of these vessels. The *Elva C.* is docked at and maintained by the Reedville Fishermen's Museum where she is used to educate visitors about the history of this traditional vessel and its service to the region.

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Historical Background

Deck boats were an important part of the lives of many Bay residents. Because they were relatively small and inexpensive, they were affordable by many, and became the sole source of income for the many thousands of people in Virginia and Maryland who either owned or worked on them. In addition to the economic contributions, deck boats also improved the commercial and social life of Bay residents, thereby serving to reduce their isolation. Very small communities, virtually inaccessible except by water, dotted the Chesapeake Bay and its many tributaries. Transit by deck boats between these communities and the major cities and agricultural centers around the Bay allowed the exchange of raw products and commercially produced goods.

Food products for both people and animals were moved from farming regions in the South to northern cities such as Baltimore, with many stops at small ports in between. Many an oldster fondly remembers seeing deck boats in the summer time, their deck laden with watermelons.

The State of Maryland used deck boats in its oyster seeding efforts. Along with skipjacks, another type of boat engaged in this endeavor, deck boats were loaded with hundreds of tons of seed oysters which were transported many miles away to oyster grounds. One deck boat, the *Yeocomico*, carried 2,200 of seed oysters, from Deep Creek, on the James River, just above Newport News, to the Coan River, a waterway off the Potomac River (Burgess). "Spitting," as the boatmen called it, occurred at the end of the oyster season, and provided a couple of months of additional income to boat owners.

Finally, while passengers generally traveled on steamboats, deck boats also had a role in transporting passengers. For example, visitors to the Jamestown, Virginia, Exposition of 1907 used deck boats to travel around the area.

All deck boats shared common characteristics. To begin with, they were all wooden boats. Some were adapted and modified sailing vessels. Some were built specifically as deck boats. The ample supply of timber in the Bay region provided the raw materials.

Most deck boats were between forty and sixty feet in length. A captain with a master's license was required to be on board if the boat exceeded sixty-five feet in length. Thus, many boats were just under sixty-five feet, or between sixty and sixty-five feet long. However, some longer boats

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were built. For example, C.H. Rice, working near Reedville, built a 77 foot boat in 1948 and an 81 foot boat in 1951, and the *Chesapeake*, one of the largest boats ever built on the Bay, measured 100 feet in length. Not surprisingly, these larger boats were built specifically for hauling bulk freight or dredging oysters.

All deck boats had enclosed hulls, and a single mast and boom configuration. When engine power was widely accepted, double masts and booms were discarded, replaced by a single mast and boom. Mast and boom were forward of the hold and the pilothouse was aft of the hold. Variations were found in types of construction. Some deck boats were built of logs, others were frame-built. Sterns could be drake-tailed, V-shaped, square, diamond, or spoon-shaped. The boats' bottom planking could either be cross-planked on longitudinally planked.

The era of the deck boat really began in the early years of the twentieth century, with the introduction of gas and diesel engines that could provide power sufficient to move heavy loads from one port to another. Larry Chowning (*Chesapeake Bay Buyboats*) lists all the deck boat builders he could document, finding 74 builders who worked in Virginia and 29 who worked in Maryland. They were widely scattered throughout the region, often located in places almost inaccessible except by boat.

There was also a fleet of bugeyes and schooners in the Chesapeake Bay that were later converted to powered deck boats. In this category, Mr. Chowning lists almost 300 boats, with Maryland being the predominating site. A mast was retained in these conversions, but was reduced in size. It was principally used as a hoisting mechanism.

The Reedville Fishermen's Museum is the owner of the *Elva C.*, an excellent example of a deck boat. She has been called a pretty little workboat and a real "looker," with a round stern that is "a comely nod to local boat building tradition." (Jett)

The *Elva C.* was built in 1922, by Gilbert White, one of Virginia's most outstanding deck boat builders. Gilbert White began boatbuilding around 1900 and built approximately 150 boats, ranging in size from 20 to 72 feet in length, until his retirement in 1947. He is noted for elliptical shaped Deadrise boats, with chunk sterns and cross-planked bottoms. He worked in his backyard, without benefit of modern tools. From his earlier log canoes to the deck boats he built later, White used primitive equipment: axe, hatchet and plane. He neither had electricity nor owned a foot adz. His only assistance in boat building came from his son and son-in-law. Nevertheless, his workmanship

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was superior. He was a perfectionist whose first step in building was often to personally select the the lumber for each boat. The *Elva C.*, in contrast to most of White's boats that used local timber, was built of Georgia heart pine. Completed in three months, the *Elva C.* measured 55.5 feet in length, 13.5 feet beam, and had a 3.7-foot draft.

The *Elva C.* had three owners. White, working in Westland, Virginia, near Windmill Point, built the boat for Captain Lee Abbot of Foxwells, who named her after this daughter. Captain Abbot used her for pound net fishing and freight until his retirement in the 1950s. She was then bought and fished by Captain Phillip Somers of Urbanna. The next owner was Captain Ira F. (Brother) Swift of Reedville, who, with his two sons Marvin and Francis, used her for pound net fishing. In 1989 the Swift family donated the *Elva C.* to the Reedville Fishermen's Museum, which is located on Cockrell's Creek.

At the beginning of a fishing season the *Elva C.* would be loaded with trap poles 55 feet or more in length. At the site of the pound net, these poles were hoisted up by the boom and driven into the river bottom. Approximately 150 poles were required to support each net. During the season, *Elva C.* often left the dock at or before dawn, with a crew of up to seven on board. Upon reaching the nets, the crew hoisted the fish out of the pound using a dip net that was lifted by a line running through pulleys on the boom to a winch on deck. The fish were then dumped into the hold. If the catch was a good one, fish would also be piled up on deck until it was almost awash. At the dock, the catch was sorted and unloaded. Herring were processed at local packing houses and the food fish were shipped directly to Baltimore.

In the off-season, the *Elva C.* was used for any purpose that would generate income. She is remembered as a freight boat running watermelons from North Carolina to Baltimore, and as a buyboat hauling oysters from the tonging boats to the shucking houses. Deck boats were also important to Reedville in the menhaden fishing industry. This industry was, and is, vital to Reedville, and in fact, was responsible for Reedville's ranking in the early 1900's as the wealthiest city, per capita, in the country. Deck boats were used as runners, hauling fish meal and fish oil from Reedville to Baltimore, and on the return trip, hauling to Reedville raw materials such as salt, fuel oil and coal.

The fact that some of Mr. White's boats are still around today is a testament to his care and skill in boat building. Two of his boats still serve the Biddlecomb family, for whom they were originally built. The *Dudley*, 65 feet in length, and the *Mary Trew*, 39 feet in length, both lie

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today in Cockrell Creek in Reedville, together with the *Elva C.*

Upon receiving the *Elva C.* from the Swift family, the Reedville Fishermen's Museum began her restoration. The work was completed in 1995. During that time, some reconstruction was necessary. Her bow stem, deck beams, planking, gunwales, and handsome round stern were replaced in-kind by George Butler of the Reedville Marine Railway. Dan Boley of Reedville gave her a new steering wheel. A rebuilt engine was later installed, and then in 2000, the horn timber was replaced and the bottom replanked by George Butler, Taylor Dawson, Frank Fife, and some twenty volunteers. Routine maintenance is carried out by Museum volunteers.

The need to preserve examples of deck boats was illustrated, when the *Ellen Marie*, built in 1926, was officially recognized as the oldest boat at a boating event in 1990. The Museum's *Elva C.*, four years older than the *Ellen Marie*, is a well-preserved example of Chesapeake Bay history, and the Museum will continue to maintain it in good condition. However, listing of the *Elva C.* in the National Register of Historic Places will help the Museum's efforts to facilitate fund raising and maintenance projects. Too many deck boats have been abandoned because of the expensive upkeep required for wooden boats. Of the few remaining, many have left the Bay area entirely and others are in private hands where their ultimate fate is unknown.

Current Museum activities involving the *Elva C.* include an annual trip for Santa Claus to the Museum dock during the Christmas celebration, ferrying dignitaries for the Blessing of the Fleet parade each year, and short cruises on Cockrell's Creek and the Great Wicomico River for Museum members and educational groups. Restoration has extended the *Elva C.*'s cruising range so that she now can appear at waterfront festivals throughout the Chesapeake Bay area.

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9. BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Chowning, Larry S., Chesapeake Bay Buyboats, Tidewater Publishers, Centreville, Maryland, 2003

Jett, Starke, "A Reedville Restoration," Chesapeake Bay Magazine, June 1998, 116

Merchant Vessels of the United States, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1925

Vojtech, Pat, Chesapeake Bay Skipjacks, Tidewater Publishers, Centreville, Maryland, 1993

Burgess, Robert H., This Was Chesapeake Bay, Tidewater Publishers, Centreville, Maryland, 1963, 157-159

Interview with David Carr; conducted on 1.10.05 by Donald George. Mr. Carr is the owner of, and lives aboard in, the *Mundy Point*, the "sister" boat of the *Elva C.*

Kemp, Peter, ed., The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988

10: Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the *Elva C.* is the physical location of the boat when docked at the Reedville Fishermen's Museum located on Route 360 in Northumberland County, Virginia. Moored at the museum's dock are several boats including the deck boat, *Elva C. and the Claud W. Somers.*

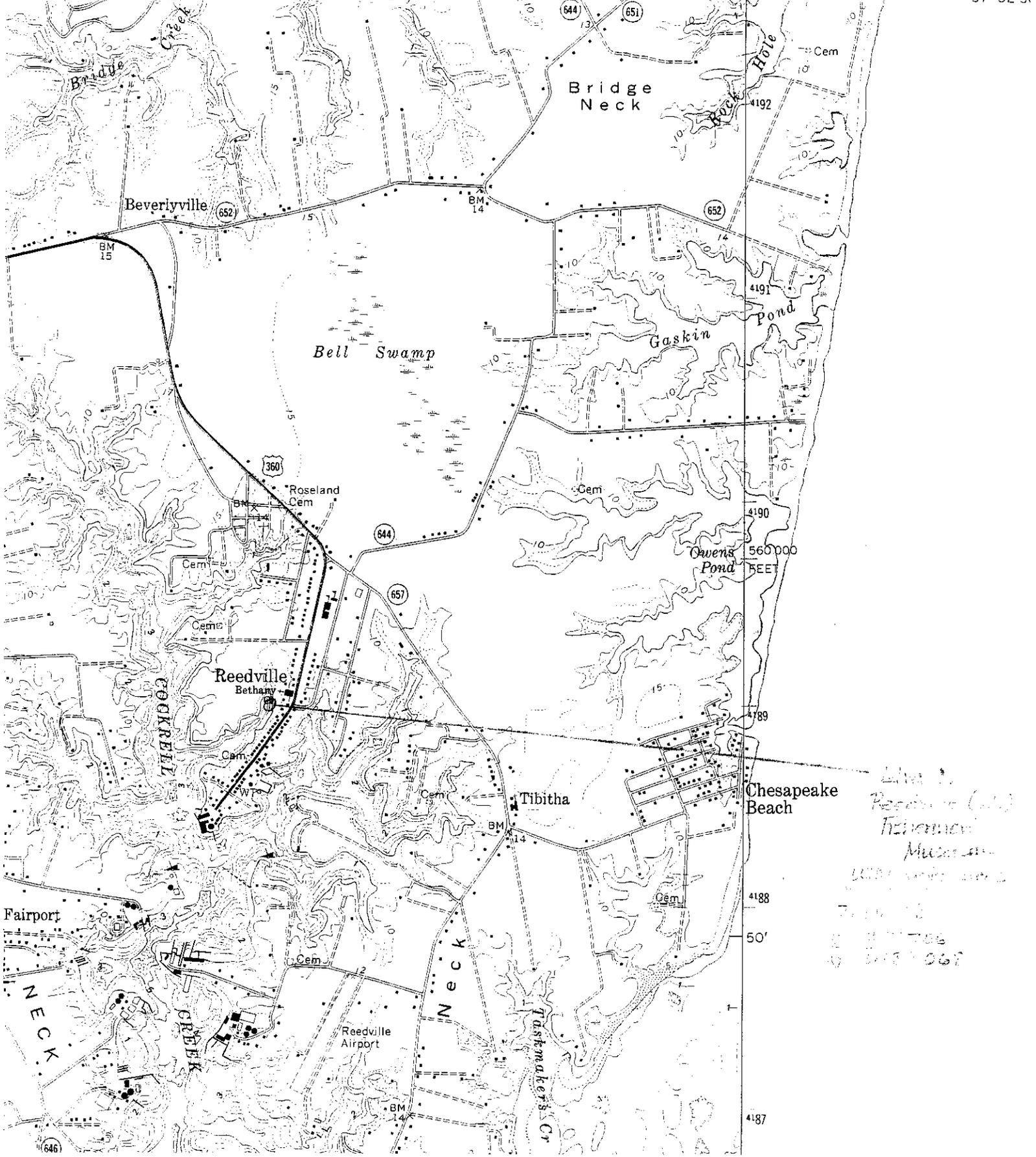
Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the deck boat, *Elva C.*, and the space in which she is docked when not in use for educational cruises along the Chesapeake Bay.

REEDVILLE QUADRANGLE
 VIRGINIA
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC-BATHYMETRIC)

5739 1 NW
 (REEDVILLE EAST)

0" 387 388 389 SUNNYBANK 0.8 MI. 76°15' 2 650 000 FEET 37°52'31"



*Edna B. Reedville (d.)
 Tidewater
 Museum
 1000 ...
 ...
 ...*