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Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum acquires tug *Huntington's* pilot house

Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company (NNS) Apprentice Alumnus Bill Lee vividly remembers standing to port of *Huntington's* pilot house on Memorial Day in 1980. Amid whistles blowing and veteran shipbuilders cheering near Hampton Roads on the Chesapeake, water cannons from the vintage tug and other vessels pointed skywards all around the NNS-built NIMITZ, CALIFORNIA and TEXAS in welcoming their returning sailors' home.

It was all part of the shipyard's flagship tug *Huntington's* active service, which began in 1933 at NNS as a hands-on learning experience for the shipyard's apprentices. After 58 years of service assisting 30,000 vessels, the tug was retired, brought back into service, and later became a floating museum before the boat was scrapped in Jacksonville, Florida in spring 2010. Fortunately, that same pilot house that Lee remembers is now at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum (CBMM) in St. Michaels, Maryland, and will soon carry forward the rich maritime history it holds for generations that follow.

With generous support from Chesapeake Shipbuilding, McAllister Towing, NNS Apprentice Alumnus Hudson Haile, and individual donors, the pilot house and captain's quarters of the once steam-powered screw tug *Huntington* – complete with furnishings and fittings, arrived by low-rider truck at CBMM on June 15, 2010. With the pilot house's restoration charted, CBMM plans a special exhibit on tugs and marine transportation possibly to be done in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the launch of the Museum's tug *Delaware* in summer 2012. Pending restoration, the *Huntington* pilot house may be located near the exhibition gallery and fitted out for Museum visitors as part of this exhibit. After the special exhibit closes, the pilot house is expected to be incorporated into a forthcoming long-term exhibition on maritime trade at the 18-acre, waterfront Museum.

NNS owned the *Huntington* (NNS Hull #356) up until 1990. Built almost entirely by apprentices for the shipyard's own use, the vessel's beam was increased by one foot over the 28-foot dimension previously used for her near-sister, C&O tug *W.J. Harahan*;

also built at NNS. *Huntington's* wider main deck meant she could work more efficiently alongside ships without the smokestack and bridge contacting the ship's flared sides. Considered the finest tugboat of her time in Hampton Roads, *Huntington's* crew referred to her as the "Queen of the Harbor." She had only three Masters during her time of service at NNS: Captain R. A. Callis, Captain M. L. Ambrose and Captain Reggie Hunley.

With a large American flag flown at her stern, the *Huntington* was christened at a gala launching on October 11, 1933. The tug's sponsor and shipyard president's granddaughter, seven year old Anne Gordon Ferguson, smashed the ceremonious champagne bottle against the tug's bow bitt, despite prohibition. *Huntington* reached top speeds of 10 knots during sea trials and was often noted as quieter, more comfortable and faster than many other tugboats at the time.

Huntington had accommodations for a crew of five, with traditional tugboat craftsmanship seen in the vertical strips of finely-finished wood paneling in her living spaces and pilot house. The pilot house originally sported a hand-carved gilded eagle with a five-foot wing span, which contributed to the tugs appearance as a showboat. In 1950, she underwent major overhaul, including the replacement of her original coal-fired boiler and reciprocating steam engine with a 1200 HP diesel engine. At that time, the gilded eagle and brass steam whistle were also removed and donated to the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, VA.

In 1992, she was sold to Bay Towing Corporation, and worked towing barges up to Baltimore. She was later sold to Rover Marine in 1996, when the *Huntington* was converted from a workboat to a floating museum and placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Ownership transferred to the Palm Beach Maritime Museum in 2007 with hopes of restoration that did not become realized. In spring 2010, *Huntington* was scrapped by Salonen Marine, Inc., of Jacksonville, Florida, but the pilot house was salvaged, thanks primarily to the efforts of Hudson Haile, and donated to the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

Tugs are and have always been a vital part of maritime transportation, especially maritime trade along the coast and within America's inland waterways like the Chesapeake Bay. Oil, containers and other materials are moved at less cost per ton-mile by water—including tug and barge—than any other mode of transportation. From docking ships to fighting fires, tugs accomplish a variety of jobs on the waterfront that occur largely out of the public eye. Yet this story has not been widely told, and this aspect of maritime transportation has been somewhat underrepresented in the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's collections and exhibits. The handsome *Huntington* pilot house will help to change both this perception and reality.

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“HuntingtonTrialRunJamesRvrCourtesyNNS&DDC.jpg”

Tug *Huntington* during her trial run on the James River. The *Huntington* was often noted as quieter, more comfortable and faster than many other tugboats of her time. Photo courtesy NNS.

“CBMM_HuntingtonArrivesatGate.jpg”

The pilot house of the tugboat *Huntington* is met by CBMM Vice President of Operations Bill Gilmore as it arrives under the Knapps Narrows Bridge entrance of the Museum.

“CBMM_HuntingtonDriver.jpg”

CBMM Boat Yard Manager Rich Scofield, Ship to Shoreline Marine Transportation Driver Howard Tobeck and CBMM Chief Curator Pete Leshner take pause after the *Huntington* pilot house has been set to land at the Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, Maryland. Plans for the *Huntington* Pilot House’s restoration are underway, with CBMM planning to include her in a future bay transportation exhibit at its Steamboat Building.

“HuntingtonCourier_CourtesyNNS&DDC.jpg”

Amid whistles blowing and veteran shipbuilders cheering on Memorial Day in 1980, the *Huntington*, as seen in the center foreground, helped welcome returning sailors’ home on the NNS-built NIMITZ, CALIFORNIA and TEXAS near Hampton Roads on the Chesapeake. Photo courtesy NNS.