

1987

S-240  
SOMERSET (skipjack)  
Wenona, Maryland

SOMERSET is a 44.9' long two-sail bateau, or V-bottomed deadrise type of centerboard sloop, commonly referred to as a skipjack. She has a beam of 15.7', a depth of 1.5', and a gross registered tonnage of 9. She carries a typical skipjack rig of jib-headed mainsail and a single large jib with a club on its foot. Built in 1949 in Reedville, Virginia following traditional Bay design and construction methods, SOMERSET 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. SOMERSET is of special interest for having been built during the post World War II revival of skipjack building for the working oyster fleet.

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No. S-240

Magi No.

DOE  yes  no

CHESAPEAKE BAY SKIPJACK FLEET THEMATIC GROUP

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic SOMERSET

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number LOWER THOROFARE n/a not for publication

city, town Wenona n/a vicinity of congressional district FIRST

state Maryland 024 county Somerset 039

## 3. Classification

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

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

name Captain Walton Benton

street & number telephone no.: 651-1762

city, town Wenona state and zip code Maryland 21870

## 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 Survey of Surviving Traditional Chesapeake Bay Craft

date 1983-1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town Annapolis, state Maryland 21401

## 7. Description

Survey No. S-240

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

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 44.9' long two-sail bateau, or V-bottom deadrise type of centerboard sloop, commonly referred to as a skipjack. Built in 1949 in Reedville, Virginia, she continues to be active in the sailing oyster fleet. She has a beam of 15.7', a depth of 1.5', and a gross register tonnage of 9. She carries a typical skipjack rig of jib-headed mainsail and large jib. She has a longhead bow with headrails and a square, or transom, stern. Her wooden hull is painted the traditional white.

SOMERSET has a straight, raking stem with a longhead or clipper bow and headrails-- wooden braces--leading from the hull to the end of the longhead. Her transom stern is low and raking. The rudder is mounted outboard on pintles and there is a chock, or jig, for the pushboat located to starboard of the rudder. There are guards running the length of the hull on the sides, protecting the hull from the oyster dredges.

The single mast is set up with double shrouds, a forestay, jib-stay, and topping lift; there are lazyjacks on both sails to aid in furling. The mainsail is laced to the boom, which is jawed to the mast. The sail is carried on wood hoops at the mast. There is a large jib with a club along its foot, rigged out to the bowsprit. The bowsprit, painted white, is rigged with double chain bobstays and cable bowsprit shrouds. There are headrails leading from the hull to the end of the longhead beneath the bowsprit. In addition to the sail rig, the vessel carries a motorized pushboat, which is suspended on davits over the stern.

The skipjack is flush-decked with a typical arrangement of deck structures including cabin trunk, winders, wheelbox, and hatches. There is a lograil at the foredeck, with a pinrail atop it from the mast aft, which is doubled at the stern. Dredging gear is carried in season.

SOMERSET is painted all white with brown trim on the pinrail.



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. S-240

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

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Deal Island, MD

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A	18	416870	4220240
	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

This working vessel is usually docked at the location indicated in Item 2. Historic boundaries are coterminous with the hull.

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

state	n/a	code	county	code
-------	-----	------	--------	------

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

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Witty/ M. E. Hayward

Radcliffe Maritime Museum

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

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

Survey No. S-240

Magi No. 2002405833

DOE  yes  no

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic SOMERSET

and/or common

## 2. Location

street &amp; number

 not for publication

city, town Wenona

 vicinity of

congressional district

state Maryland

county Somerset

## 3. Classification

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

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

name Captain Walton Benton

street &amp; number

telephone no.: 651-1762

city, town Wenona

state and zip code Maryland 21870

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

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city, town

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title

date

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depository for survey records

city, town

state

## 7. Description

Survey No. S-240

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
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unaltered  
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original site  
 moved    date of move \_\_\_\_\_

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SOMERSET is painted all white with brown trim on the pinrail.

# 8. Significance

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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" 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 1949 Builder/Architect Unknown

check: Applicable Criteria:  A  B  C  D  
 and/or  
 Applicable Exception:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  
 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 36 surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and a member of the last commercial sailing fleet in the United States. Cut 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.

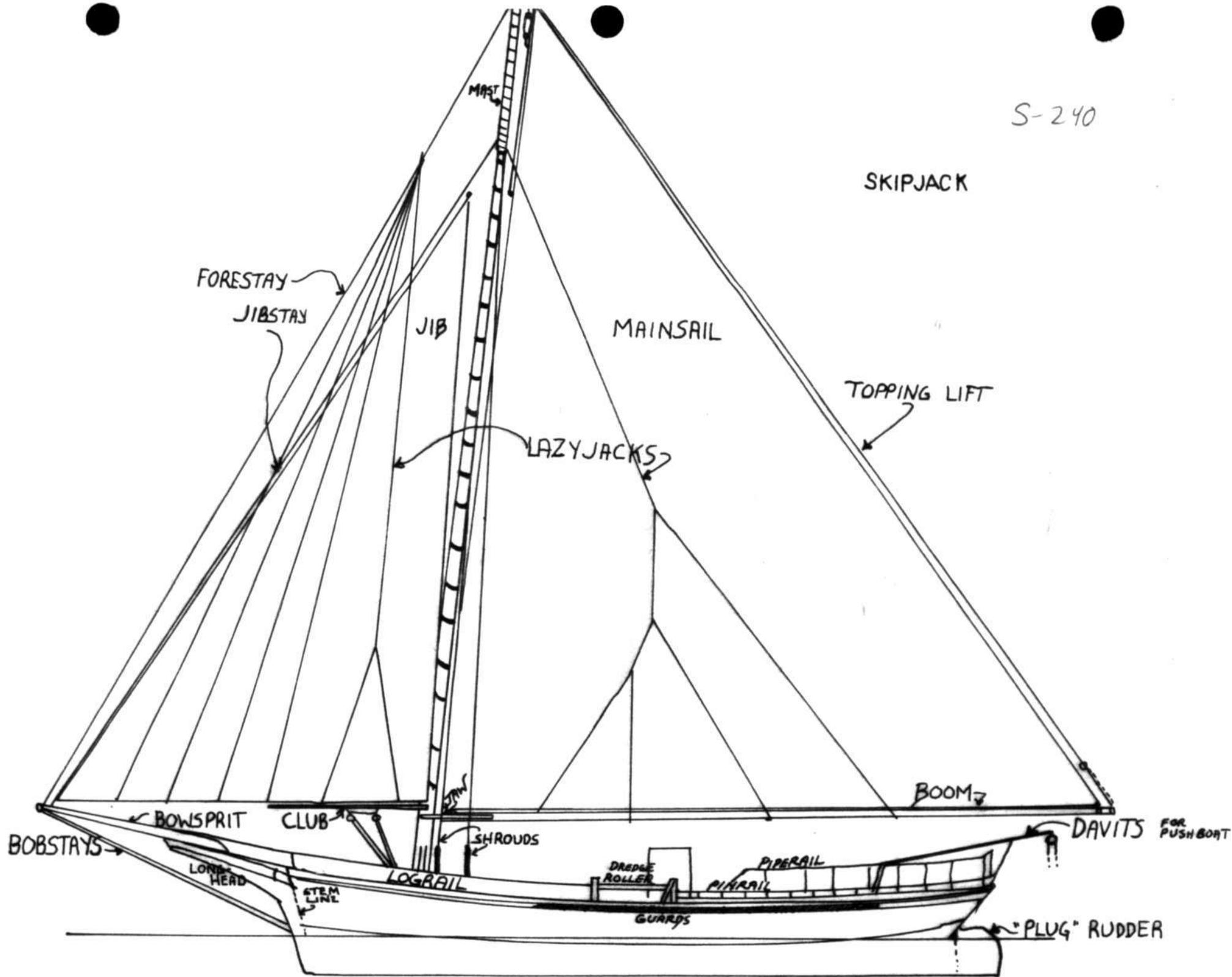
The skipjack evolved as a distinct type of Bay vessel in the 1890's as a cheaper-to-construct alternative to the earlier bugeyes and other traditional framed craft, in a period when shipbuilding costs were rising and the oyster catch was diminishing. The type was devised by enlarging (to 25 to 60 feet) 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.

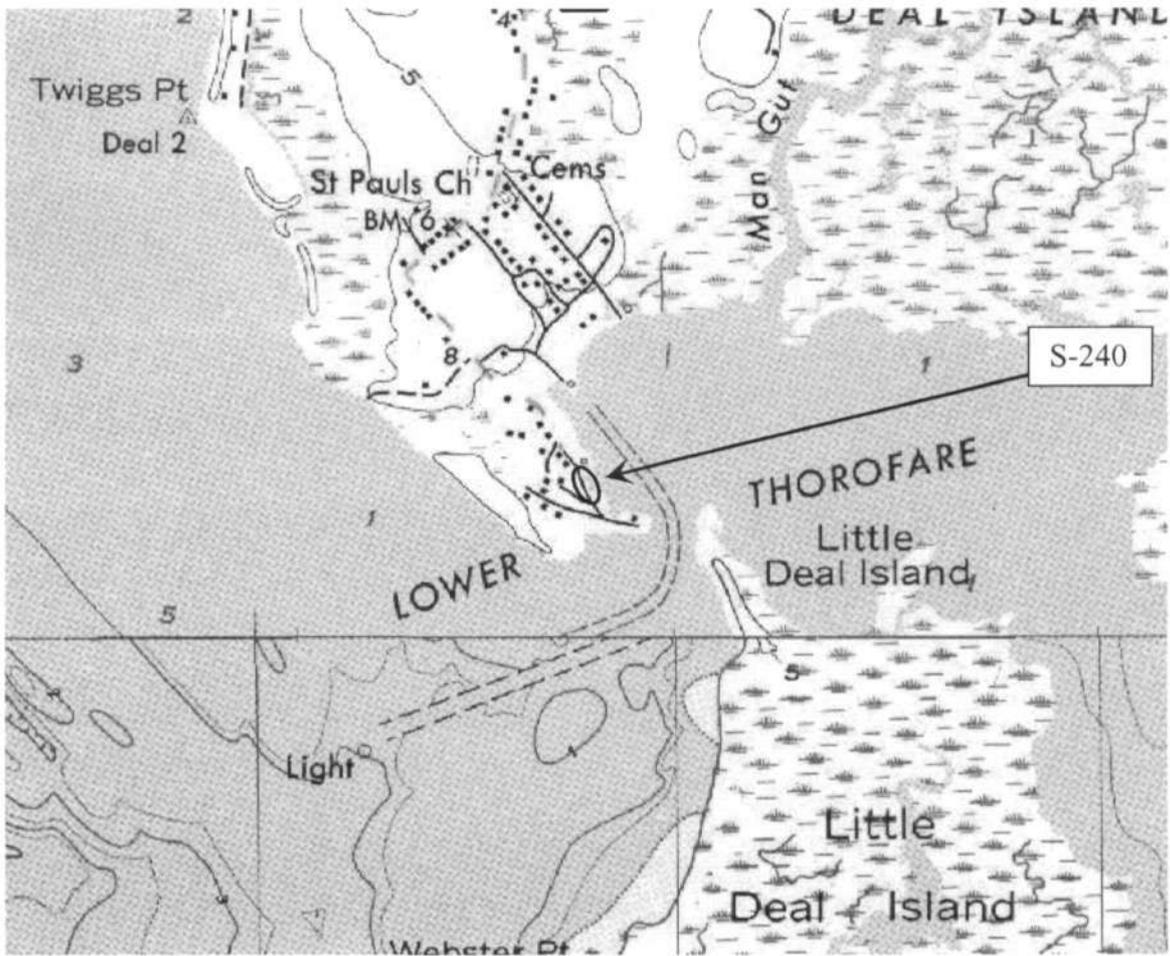
SOMERSET is of interest as having been built during the post World War II revival of skipjack building for the working oyster fleet. She was built in 1949 in Reedville, Virginia following traditional Bay design and construction methods. She has worked in the oyster dredging fleet since her building and is presently based at Deal Island. The vessel was one of 10 skipjacks built after World War II during a boom in the oyster business, all of which are still active except for the ROSIE PARKS. It is of great interest that even though these vessels were built over 50 years after the peak skipjack-building years, their design and construction closely follows earlier prototypes.



S-240



S-240  
Somerset (skipjack)  
Wenona  
Deal Island Quad.  
Somerset County





S-240

SOMERSET  
Wenona, Md

port bow sail  
M.C. Wootton

11/83



S-240

SOMERSET  
Wenona, Md

port side sail  
M. C. Wootton

11/83