

Capsule Summary
SM-623
Palmer Marine Railway
Abell Vic.
Private
(Page 1)

c. 1931

Due to changing environmental legislation and economic trends, marine railways are becoming increasingly rare across the maritime landscape of St. Mary's County. Palmer's marine railway located on St. Patrick Creek near Abell, Maryland represents one of the last fully operational, commercial railways remaining in the county if not the Chesapeake region. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, marine railways played a crucial role in the repair of fishing, crabbing, and oyster fleets in the Chesapeake. While many cities, such as Baltimore, featured railways for schooners and large ships, smaller facilities in the Chesapeake's many rivers and creeks were a critical component in the maritime economy. These smaller facilities were often powered by steam engines and even mules and oxen.¹ Within this context, Palmer's Marine Railway is significant as an excellent example of this property type -- a rare property type in a rapidly changing landscape. Other known marine railways in St. Mary's County include Ewell's railway which was situated on Combs Creek near Compton, Maryland (yet undocumented).

Beginning in the late-1920s, a St. Mary's County boatbuilder named Wilmer Palmer realized the need for a commercial drydock for the seasonal scraping, painting, and repairing of wooden boat hulls.² In 1931, Palmer became the first railway on St. Patrick's Creek when he laid out a series of wooden poles perpendicular to the shoreline allowing boats to be pulled up on

1 Calvert County Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland, Photographic Collection, Marine Railways. See photographs P-2590, P-8905, P-8906, P-8451.

2 Interview of Wilmer Palmer by Paula Johnson, April 7, 1983, Calvert Marine Museum, PRP PJR90, PJR91, and PJR92. An informal interview was conducted with Creighton Palmer in February, 1998 by Kirk Ranzetta.

— Capsule Summary

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(Page 2)

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— shore. These crude poles were soon replaced by more permanent railroad rails and two engines were acquired for pulling the water craft out of the water. Housed in wood sheds, the engine driven winches were fashioned from a 1928 Model A Ford engine and a four cylinder "Wisconsin." Metal cables extended from these engine driven winches and were attached to a wooden undercarriage which rode on top of the rails. At high tide, these undercarriages are placed in the water and the boat was slowly positioned on top of them. The boat was then pulled on shore. With the invention and widespread use of the hydraulic boat lift, the growing popularity of fiberglass work boats, and new environmental laws concerning marinas, the Palmer Marine railway is threatened with almost certain closure. Wilmer Palmer's son Creighton, the current owner, continues to run the facility although 1998 may be his last year of operation.

SM-623, Palmer's Marine Railway
St. Mary's County
Maryland Comprehensive State Historic Preservation Data

Historic Context

Geographic Organization: Western Shore
Chronological/Developmental Period: Modern Period, 1930-present
Historic Period Theme: Economic

Resource Type

Category: Structure
Historic Environment: Rural
Historic Function and Use: Marine Railway
Known Design Source: None

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF
HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Survey No. SM-623

Magi No.

DOE yes no

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Part of Collingwood, Farrum, Cobrum, & Bedlam Neck

and/or common Palmer's Marine Railway

2. Location

0.2 of a mile W of int. of Wilmer Palmer Rd. & Golden Thompson Rd., on Wilmer Palmer Rd. not for publication

city, town Abell vicinity of congressional district 7

state Maryland county St. Mary's TM-46, G-18, P-66

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"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input 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 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 Creighton W. Palmer

street & number PO Box 45 telephone no.: 301-769-2160

city, town Abell state and zip code Maryland 20606

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. St. Mary's County Courthouse liber MRB 450

street & number folio 449

city, town Leonardtown state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No. SM-623

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" 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.

Contributing Resource Count: 1

Palmer's Marine Railway is located approximately 0.1 mile west from the intersection of Golden Thompson and Wilmer Palmer Roads near Abell, Maryland. Situated on the banks of St. Patrick's Creek, the unsheltered railway is roughly oriented on an east/west axis.

Initially constructed c. 1928, the railway consists of two sets of railroad rails that extend from the shore and decline into the water. A rolling wooden base, connected via a cable to an engine driven winch, slides into the water and underneath the boats in the water. The winch then hauls the boat and undercarriage onto the shore where it can be painted and serviced. Creighton Palmer currently employs two different engines that are completely enclosed in wooden boxes. The north railway utilizes a four cylinder Wisconsin while the south railway features a 1928 Model A Ford engine.

A pier supported by a series of pilings is situated between the two railways. The pier allows easier manipulation of the boats onto the railway. On the shore, a small frame storage shed is situated between the two railways. It stores paints, tools, and other boat oriented implements and supplies.

8. Significance

Survey No. SM-623

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/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates	Builder/Architect
check: Applicable Criteria: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D and/or	
Applicable Exception: <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D <input type="checkbox"/> E <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> G	
Level of Significance: <input type="checkbox"/> national <input type="checkbox"/> state <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local	

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

Due to changing environmental legislation and economic trends, marine railways are becoming increasingly rare across the maritime landscape of St. Mary's County. Palmer's marine railway located on St. Patrick Creek near Abell, Maryland represents one of the last fully operational, commercial railways remaining in the county if not the Chesapeake region. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, marine railways played a crucial role in the repair of fishing, crabbing, and oyster fleets in the Chesapeake. While many cities, such as Baltimore, featured railways for schooners and large ships, smaller facilities in the Chesapeake's many rivers and creeks were a critical component in the maritime economy. These smaller facilities were often powered by steam engines and even mules and oxen.¹ Other known marine railways in St. Mary's County include Ewell's railway which was situated on Combs Creek near Compton, Maryland (yet undocumented).

Beginning in the late-1920s, a St. Mary's County boatbuilder named Wilmer Palmer realized the need for a commercial drydock for the seasonal scraping, painting, and repairing of wooden boat hulls.² In 1931, Palmer became the first railway on St. Patrick's Creek when he laid out a series of wooden poles perpendicular to the shoreline allowing boats to be pulled up on shore. These crude poles were soon replaced by more permanent railroad rails and two engines were acquired for pulling the water craft out of the water. Housed in wood sheds, the engine driven winches were fashioned from a 1928 Model A Ford engine and a four cylinder "Wisconsin." Metal cables extended from these engine driven winches and were attached to a wooden undercarriage which rode on top of the rails. At high tide, these undercarriages are placed in the water and the boat was slowly positioned on top of them. The boat was then pulled on shore.

¹ Calvert County Marine Museum, Solomons, Maryland, Photographic Collection, Marine Railways. See photographs P-2590, P-8905, P-8906, P-8451.

² Interview of Wilmer Palmer by Paula Johnson, April 7, 1983, Calvert Marine Museum, PRP PJR90, PJR91, and PJR92. An informal interview was conducted with Creighton Palmer in February, 1998 by Kirk Ranzetta.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. SM-623

Interview with Creighton Palmer, February, 1998.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 3.12 acres

Quadrangle name Stratford Hall

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
---	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
---	----------------------	----------------------	----------------------

E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

Same as per deed description.

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

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk E. Ranzetta, Historic Sites Surveyor

organization St. Mary's County Dept. of Planning & Zoning

date 4-27-98

street & number 22740 Washington Street

telephone 301-475-4662

city or town Leonardtown

state Maryland

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
DHCP/DHCD
100 COMMUNITY PLACE
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2023
514-7600

SM-623, Palmer Marine Railway
St. Mary's County
8.1 Significance

Usually in operation from April 1st to October, the railway was largely operated by Wilmer Palmer but he also received some aid from Sam "Mack" Dyson who lived at a nearby tenant house. Palmer, however, did not usually do the painting or scraping himself as he often let his customers work on the boats themselves as he recalled charging \$2.50 only for pulling the boat out of the water. While not operating the railway, Palmer was engaged in building boats. As one of the most prolific boatbuilders during the mid-twentieth century in the "Seventh District" Palmer specialized in building fore-aft plank dory boats. Palmer died in 1986. With the invention and widespread use of the hydraulic boat lift, the growing popularity of fiberglass work boats, and new environmental laws concerning marinas, the Palmer Marine railway is threatened with almost certain closure. Wilmer Palmer's son Creighton, the current owner, continues to run the facility although 1998 may be his last year of operation.

SM-623, Palmer Marine Railway
St. Mary's County
8.2 Significance

Chain-of-Title

(All deeds are located at the Land Records Office, St. Mary's County Courthouse, Leonardtown, Maryland unless otherwise noted.)

Reference: Liber MRB 450, Folio 449

Grantee: Creighton W. Palmer

Grantor: Mary Elizabeth Palmer

Date: January 3, 1987

Notes: The tract, containing 3.12 acres, is called "Part of Collingwood."

Reference: Liber CBG 85, Folio 67

Grantee: Mary Elizabeth Palmer

Grantor: Wilmer E. and Veronica Palmer

Date: November 27, 1959

Notes: Wilmer Palmer inherited the property from his father Edwin J. Palmer (see Will Records Liber MLC 1, Folio 380).

Reference: Liber JMM 2, Folio 493

Grantee: Edwin J. Palmer

Grantor: Ellen D. Palmer, et al

Date: September 20, 1924

Reference: Liber JJG 3, Folio 354

Grantee: Edwin J. Palmer

Grantor: Samuel E. F. Palmer, executor of John Palmer

Date: February 17, 1896

Notes: Here the parcel includes 175 acres.

Reference: Liber JFF 9, Folio 464

Grantee: John Palmer

Grantor: George R. Gaither, Jr.

Date: March 27, 1887

Notes: The property here is listed as containing 440 acres.

Reference: Mortgage Record, Liber JFF 5, Folio 196

Grantee: Thomas H. Gaither

Grantor: Sarah A. Long

Date: September 12, 1881

Reference: Will Record, Liber JTMR 1, Folio 358

Grantee: Sarah A. Long

Grantor: John B. Long

Date: May 13, 1874

Notes: No previous deed is listed.

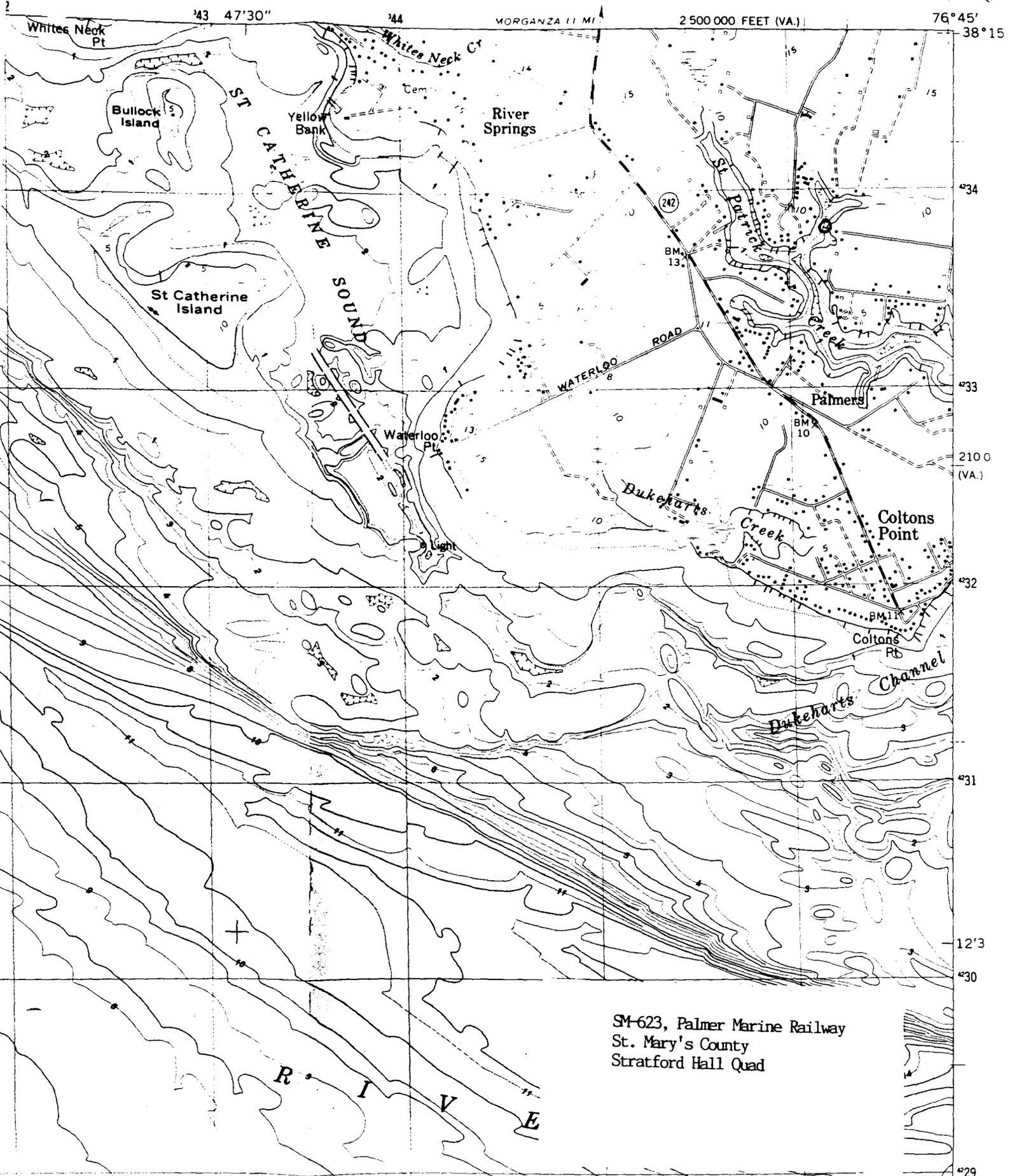
INIA
RCES

STRATFORD HALL QUADRANGLE

VIRGINIA - MARYLAND

7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC - BATHYMETRIC)

ILEC. 56



SM-623, Palmer Marine Railway
St. Mary's County
Stratford Hall Quad



SM-623

Palmer Marine Railway

St. Marg's County

Kirk Ranzetta

April/98

Md CHPO

Railway - looking E

1 of 3



IN-623

Palmer Marine Railway

St. Mary's County

Kirk Ranzezza

April/98

MD SHPO

Roy Thompson + his workboat "EU"

2 of 3



SM-623

Palmer Marine Railway

St. Mary's County

Kirk Ranzetta

April/98

did skip

Jimmy Morris fishing workboat "Ruth Lee"

3 of 3