

downrigging weekend 2007





Every year, a dozen or so historic tall ships (some shorter than others) come to Chestertown Maryland, on the Chester River, just north of the Bay Bridge. It's the first weekend in November, the end of the sailing season for most of these vessels, whether real history or reproduction. For the doughty Chesapeake Bay skipjacks, though, this would have been the start of their season, dredging for oysters. Now the last all-sail working fleet in America is reduced, like the oysters, to a few remnants. The Stanley Norman and the Elsworth ply the Bay now with students; workhorses with wings, making lasting connections between the next generation and the greatest estuary in North America. (below: Elsworth, Stanley Norman, Pride)





*That's me on the skipjack Stanley Norman (she's 102 years old), Kalmar astern.
Below: Lady Maryland (pungey schooner, small, swift bay craft delivered perishable goods, evolved out of same lines as Baltimore Clippers like Pride) under S.Norman's boom.*





*above: schooner Martha White
below: Mozart was still composing on a harpsichord when
these ships sailed: Sultana (1768) and Kalmar Nyckel
(1630s)*



The John Smith Shallop, sailed and rowed 121 days, 1500 miles, around the Bay in the wake of John Smith (as in, yeah, the Pocahontas guy) who was the first European to explore the Bay, nobody did a better map for a couple hundred years. This shallop had no engine, eight oars, seven men, five women and one port-a-bucket. They established the nation's first National Historic Water Trail, so far three of the interpretive buoys (accessible by cell phone from your boat, or online) have been set up.











*Preceeding three pages:
Sultana.*

Left: "Please don't stand up here while the skipjack is underway ...here's why." The immense booms provided power, not speed, like low gear in a tractor. That's essentially what skipjacks were doing: plowing the bottom for oysters.

Below: skipjack Stanley Norman's ornately carved bow.

Following pages: Kalmar, Virginia/Pride/Lady Maryland, Kalmar's ornate stern seen from Sultana's deck. (Oyster buy boat ahead).









schooner Sultana



Pride seen through Sultana's rigging...

Sultana is an authentic replica of the original Sultana, built in 1768 as a merchant ship, bought by the British Navy and used in pre-revolutionary America to enforce those dreaded tea taxes. This Sultana sails out of Chestertown on a very different mission; carrying students on adventures of learning about everything from history to the ecology of the Bay. She does day sails and "two hour tours". And they'll even let you drive the boat, as this young sailor is doing.













*I've been here before, sailed on Sultana and Pride, on the Chester. This year I arrived by ship: this one.
below: beach art at Duck Neck camp (Pride)*



