

Reedville, VA: Historic Fishing Village

by Terry Conway



Across from the Buzzard Point Marina at the mouth of the Reedville VA inlet.

Watermen have cast their wickerwork, pots, and pound nets off Reedville, Va.'s waters for 150 years hauling in fish, crabs, and oysters. But it was Maine's Elijah Reed who put the Virginia village on America's commercial fishing map.



Watermen at work

A retired sea captain who just couldn't get the sea out of his bones, Reed discovered that menhaden fish were ignored in the Chesapeake, even though they were actively fished in New England. Menhaden (also known as mossbunker and bunker), are part of the herring family. Sniffing out a successful commercial enterprise, Reed set up 15 fish processing plants. Fortunes were made, and by the late 19th century this village of sea captains and industrialists boasted the



Reedville Fisherman's Museum

highest per-capita income of any American community.

Full of bones and very oily, the fish is considered unfit for human consumption. These days, though, its oils are formulated into everything from lipstick to cat food and crammed with those "good fats", omega-3 fatty acids. A Houston-based corporation operates a \$17 million menhaden plant here. It's the second largest commercial fishery in the country, by weight.

Surrounded by rolling farmland and piney woods,

Reedville is a destination at the little explored, low-key peninsula in northernmost Virginia. The Rappahannock River is to the south and Chesapeake Bay flanks it on the east. Locals refer to the region as an earlier, purer version of Maryland's Eastern Shore. A stroll along Main Street serves up views of grand Victorian homes, a stretch that's been dubbed Millionaire's Row. Several homes are operated as bed-and-breakfast establishments. Just down the street sits the Reedville Fishermen's Museum, which preserves the rich waterman heritage of Virginia's northern neck and Chesapeake Bay. Housing permanent and changing exhibits, the William Walker House is a restored waterman's home from the turn of the century.

Alongside the museum, visitors will find the *Claude W. Somers*, a 42-foot skipjack built in 1911, and the *Elva C.*, a 55-foot traditional workboat dating from 1922. Two years ago both vessels were entered into the National Register of Historic Places. Future plans call for the museum to expand its campus to include a boat building facility and model-making enterprises.

Reedville is also a significant charter-fishing center for Chesapeake Bay bluefish and rockfish (striped bass) with more than 50 boats operating out of the area. For two decades, the town has hosted the Bluefish Derby each June. First prizes for largest bluefish and largest rockfish are \$5,000, and a cumulative weight prize will be divided into two \$2,500 prizes- one for bluefish and one for rockfish. The Derby is based out of Buzzard Point Marina, a full service marina with plenty of deepwater slips for boaters to berth. The event benefits Smith Point Sea Rescue, an organization known for assisting boaters in distress.

Fourteen miles due east is Tangier Island. Climb aboard the *Chesapeake Breeze* for a cruise where you can see menhaden swimming in large dense schools close to the surface. The bad news - if you're



Tangier Island

a menhaden - is so do the spotter planes who radio fishing vessels who then cast out a 1500-foot net. It's easy pickings.

Boaters who tie up in White Stone can pop by the Tri-Star "Social" Grocery and grab something fresh from the fryer and then head down to White Stone Wine & Cheese Shop for a hearty bottle of wine. You can also pick up tasty scallops, shrimp and crab cakes from the deli at Smith Seafood.

If you're searching for a cozy spot for crabs and beer, head over to the Crazy Crab at Reedville Marina, overlooking the



Cruise to Tangier Island aboard the "Chesapeake Breeze".

picturesque waterfront. It also serves delightful homemade specialties emphasizing local catch and fantastic hushpuppies.

Tommy's, over on Main Street, specializes in regional cuisine; dinner for two, with wine, runs about \$50. Dubbed "the galley in the alley," McPatty's in

Kilmarnock is a marvelous pub located across from the bowling alley. Its walls are plastered with vintage photos, and the owners dish out terrific Irish fare, local seafood and plenty of pints of Guinness.

Operated by Susan and Bob Tipton, the Cedar

Grove B & B Inn is a stately colonial-style home that overlooks Chesapeake Bay. From the wicker-decorated balcony, you can watch the lighthouse that guards the entrance to the Great Wicomico River and, in winter, spot the Arctic swans that make these marshes their home.

Get acquainted with other visitors over a glass of wine during cocktail hour at the Morris House at the foot of Main Street. The inn is an exceptional restoration of a sea captain's home built in 1835 and has recently been renovated. If you elect to stay here, request the top-floor suite that has its own wet-bar, refrigerator and Jacuzzi. You can borrow the house skiff for a water tour or just stretch out on the dock and watch the sailboats glide by.

For more information on Reedville, call 800-393-6180 or visit, www.northernneck.org.