

Steam Tug *Baltimore*

by Stephen Heaver

Steam tug *Baltimore* is approaching her 100 birthday. On 8 December 1906, she was recorded as having made 11 knots at 156 turns in her original sea trials—not bad for a compound engine with a 22”-stroke. Her double-furnace Scotch boiler was hand-fired, just as it is today, and the safety lifted at 150 pounds, although it is now set for 115.

Baltimore last steamed in autumn 1999 when, for three days, she took guests out past Fort McHenry and back. She was last bunkered by a fork lift at the CSX coal facility (formerly B&O Railroad Co.) with 10 tons of western Maryland’s semi-bituminous. In the old days, she was bunkered on Wednesdays at the Canton Coal Pier, more frequently if she was breaking ice on the Patapsco. Due to a weakened hull from delaminating wrought iron, *Baltimore* has been “red-lined” until her hull and thwartship members are returned to proper thickness. It is estimated that it will take \$1,500,000 to restore her hull; she also needs a new pine deck, guards, and stabilization of her wooden house.

This tug is probably the last operating, hand-fired, coal-burning steam tug in the US and is certainly the last of the inland waterway tugs that maintains her original machinery. Her story is one of honorable service in a great American port where she was built by skilled laborers and operated by generations of mariners before being retired and sold to a private collector in 1963. Her boiler had been converted to oil burning in 1957, but little else was changed over the years, with the possible exception of an electrical upgrade

in 1947. (Her original 25KW Westinghouse DC generator had made her an ‘electric boat’ in 1906 at a time when such luxuries were reserved for bigger boats.) She sank in fifteen feet of water in 1979 where she sat for two years. The McLean Contracting Co. raised her and towed her to within a few thousand feet from the Skinner Ship Building Co., Baltimore, where she’d been built.

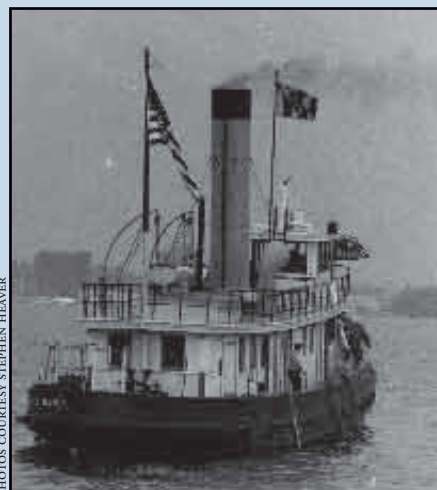
This meritorious salvage work was done at the behest of the fledgling Baltimore Museum of Industry,



PHOTO BY DONALD REHL

imately \$2,400 annually and raised funding, some from the Maryland Historic Trust, for her hull painting and repairs. Others donated paint, marine surveys, boiler tubes, towing, and other special needs.

In 2004 the Museum Board decided that *Baltimore*



PHOTOS COURTESY STEPHEN HEAVER

which had just opened in an old oyster canning building on Key Highway. Key Highway itself was created in 1905 as a result of the rebuilding of Baltimore following its Great Fire of 1904, but that’s another story. A hardy team of volunteers and an enthusiastic Board of Directors proceeded with salvaging *Baltimore* and putting her back into service as an operational teaching exhibit of the Museum.

Tons of mud and debris were removed from her bilges (the house had been repaired by 1985); the black gang was ready to light off the boiler. Some small pumps were tested and work continued vigorously with steamings taking place twice annually until 1990 when she made a clean sweep of her sea trials. She continued to steam bi-annually, offering guests rides under the close scrutiny of the US Coast Guard. Machinery details continue to be restored, encompassing everything right through the fire mains (1999) and circulating pump (now underway). Most all of this work has been accomplished by volunteers using gifts of materials from businesses. The Museum provided approx-

no longer fit into its plan for industrial interpretation and is seeking a new home for the tug. Simultaneously, her crew members formed a new corporation, the Baltimore & Chesapeake Steamboat Co., to raise money to complete her restoration and possibly take on the ownership role. The new organization is currently applying for tax exempt status and is building a Board of Directors with the intent of making an offer. Timing is of the essence and the tug is in dire need of a haulout and three coats of paint to buy her time. The BMI is receptive to a potential 501(c)(3) to which it can transfer title. The Baltimore Maritime Museum may be a good fit, but annual maintenance costs are a serious concern to a museum already strapped to maintain its fleet of three—*Torsk*, *Chesapeake*, and *Taney*. The Maryland Historic Trust has been apprised of the situation. ⚓

For more information: contact the Baltimore Museum of Industry, write to Ms. Carole Baker, Deputy Director, 1415 Key Highway, Baltimore, MD 21230 or e-mail Stephen Heaver, volunteer Project Director, at sgheaver@aol.com.