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Miss Lonesome: Old Boats Past their Prime

by Garth Woodruff

One of my favorite albums is by a local band many of you may know, Them Eastport Oyster Boys. I wore out the CD “Miss Lonesome,” named for its mellow licks on track eight. These storytellers’ regional flavor has now made it all the way to Spotify! The title song itself tells the story of an old neglected hulk, once graceful and beautiful, which sits rotting in some sad cove with “sunlight creeping through her lee.”

As a boy, similar scenes drew me into the Bay for adventure and exploration. What mystery could lie in such a boat, where was it from, and what exciting journey cast its fate in such a place? To this day I like nothing more than wandering bone yards in winter, taking in the lines of various vessels and pondering the opportunities.

However, different from my childhood memories and *Miss Lonesome*, stands modernization. What were once wooden corpses slowly becoming compost are now fiberglass containers holding small samples of polluting fluids. What presented itself as a great idea years ago in the age of the ‘classic plastics’ now exists as unwanted rotting boats that aren’t worth the money to bring back to life and aren’t easy to discard. C. S. Forester would have scuttled such



vessels under the command of Lieutenant Hornblower just off Bloody Point. Not so easy in 2016. More and more we see these sad ladies paraded on the eBay sailboat meat market; her time is over. So, what are our options?

I’ve seen folks raise a sunken boat, lost for more than two years in the mud, and bring her completely back to life because of fiberglass. But not all boats can be saved. Sadly, fiberglass isn’t an easily recycled product. In 80 years of making fiberglass, only a few companies have developed ways to recycle it. Options are limited (and expensive). Boats are building up on the hard, consuming valuable Chesapeake waterfront real estate. Owners can’t afford to put them to rest, or don’t know ways to do so.

Maryland has a nifty Abandoned Boat and Debris Grant Program as part of its Waterway Improvement Fund. This works only for “proven” abandoned boats (those abandoned for 30-180 days, depending upon the property being private, public, or belonging to a business); it’s for agencies not individuals. There are a number of Chesapeake-based nonprofits that accept boat donations for those that need work but aren’t total losses (listed here under “donate your boat” and also in our brokerage section on page 96).

What about the boat whose time has come? A handful of (hard-to-find) companies will take or buy the boat simply to strip and recycle her. They (or you)

Boat Disposal and You

How to dispose of a boat depends on your jurisdiction and environmental concerns. Contact your local public works office for proper disposal instructions, or call a licensed salvage company. If you know of other proper disposal methods on the Chesapeake or beyond, please share with readers via editor@spinsheet.com.

remove the entire rig; anything worth selling gets listed on eBay or on specialty sites. Anything not worth selling separates into piles of similar material. Pull off all hardware and treat it the same; turn the metals into recyclers for cash, and dispose of engines and fluids responsibly.

The remaining fiberglass shell can get cut into small pieces. Local boatyards tell us that the only thing left to do with these pieces is put them into a roll-off dumpster and take them to a landfill. In theory, these pieces can be crushed or chopped for reuse in new manufacturing (yet we do not know of any such companies in Chesapeake country). Such small demand for fiberglass recycling has limited our options. At this point, an eyesore full of mystery fluids can be mostly reused and what is left diminished to such small sizes that our landfills hardly realize the pressure.

This idea of recycling boats: “Sanford and Sons” meet *Miss Lonesome*. ■

Donate Your Boat

Here are a few programs that accept boat donations:

- Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum in St. Michaels, cbmm.org
- Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating (CRAB) in Annapolis, crabsailing.org
- Downtown Sailing Center in Baltimore downtownsailing.org (boat must be in good enough condition for immediate use in their program—not a rehab boat)
- Planet Hope in Deale, MD, planethope.org

Did we miss one? Email editor@spinsheet.com to tell us about it.

Learn More: To learn about Maryland’s Abandoned Boat Program, visit dnr2.maryland.gov/Boating/Pages/abandonedboats.aspx