For seventy years, this reticent, weatherworn, gentle man has been building an enviable reputation

STORY AND PHOTO BY JEFFREY WELSH

'BAILEY-BUILT'

MEANS EXCELLENCE IN DOCKS AND BULKHEADS

John Bailey holds out his hand. It's a big hand, almost too big for his body, and it is certainly not the hand of an old man. He remarks on the creosote smeared across his palm, "They won't like this much."

"There's not much to be done about that, is there?" he's asked.

"No." He shakes his head and smiles, then resumes his watch over the work being done on a dock on a creek in Talbot County. From time to time, in a quiet voice rich with the accent of the Eastern Shore, he offers a comment or suggestion.

When the dock is done and John Bailey, his crew, and the odd assortment of equipment, barges and boats clustered around the dock are gone, the owner of the dock will no doubt often mention, to friends, who built the dock. "That's a Bailey-built dock," he'll say, and the people who know anything about such things will understand.

John Bailey has been building docks for 70 years, nearly three quarters of a century. His father was a carpenter who built bulkheads and docks from time to time, and John went to work with him when Teddy Roosevelt was serving his second term as President. He went to work when the great hammers that drive pilings were raised by hand, tripped, and raised by hand again.

In those days, and until the first Bay Bridge was built, there were fer-

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ry slips to build, maintain and repair. Today, however, most of John Bailey's docks and bulkheads are built for the county, or on private estates. The man who pays John Bailey to drive pilings into the mud and sand of the Eastern Shore, unless he's a very young man, shouldn't expect to see Bailey again.

"I've been working with him for 30 years, and I haven't been back to one place," says Lee Bailey, John's nephew and the man who has assumed most of the responsibility for day-to-day operations. That durability, almost permanence, is the hallmark of John Bailey's work, and is one of the reasons people seek him out when they need work done.

Not only do they seek him out, but they're willing to wait to have the work done. A man in Chestertown, two counties to the north of Talbot County, has heard of "Bailey-built" docks. In fact, he knows a man who waited two years for Bailey rather than have someone else do the work.

"And," he adds, "I hear he won't build a dock for you unless he likes you. A typical Eastern Shoreman."

John Bailey may or may not build a dock for a man he doesn't like, but there's no question about his origins. He's a 'Shoreman,' and like many of that changing breed, he does not suffer fools kindly. Eastern Shoremen, particularly the men who work on and around the water, must live by their wits, by learning and not forgetting what they've learned.

When he talks about some of the things men have asked him to do, there's a twinkle in his eye. His smile tells you he's been asked to do some foolish things, and he says he's tried to talk people out of what they wanted when he's known it was a mistake, but he hasn't lost any sleep over it when they insisted. Eastern Shoremen won't chase a man down the street to tell him he's going in the wrong direction after they've pointed out the right way once.

Docks are curious things. The good ones are level, and solid from one end to the other. They are made of heavy lumber, long nails best driven with a sledgehammer, and whole trees, trimmed and treated with creosote. They are the product of back-breaking work and machines which raise and lower iron hammers weighing hundreds and hundreds of pounds.

Yet the men who build docks and bulkheads do so almost gently. They are meticulous in their work, placing the pilings slowly and carefully and raising or lowering the deck with an eye constantly on a carpenter's level. A quarter of an inch too high or too low is not acceptable; it must be exact, because their livelihood depends upon it.

As Lee Bailey observes, the word gets around if you build a good dock, and it gets around, probably even quicker, if you build a bad one. When it's a Bailey dock, you have a reputation to live up to.

"Well, we have a pretty good reputation," John Bailey says. "We've tried to do right by people, and not gyp them. I guess it's because we haven't gypped people," he answers when asked why his work is so famous on the 'Shore.

Nephew Lee, whose father, Edwin, was a partner in the operation until retiring a few years ago, agrees, "He has a good reputation because he's always been fair to people. And," Lee adds, "because John Bailey knows how to build docks that endure."

They do things differently, Lee says, and they do some things that other dock builders don't. Tricks of the trade, secrets that make a difference when the dock is finished. He won't say what they are.

Ask John Bailey if there are secrets to what he does, and he smiles again, that same smile. "No. No secrets. There was a man, came around here, wanted to build his own dock. He went to everybody, all the contractors, see how it was done." John Bailey let him come watch.

John Bailey doesn't talk too much anyway, and he probably didn't say much then, and the man went away probably not knowing what he had seen. That same, bemused smile on John Bailey's face tells you that. He probably sat on a piling or stood nearby, as he does now, watching the work progress and making an occasional suggestion. And when the man asked the best way to sink a piling, John Bailey probably answered, "Straight."

He is one of the few Eastern Shoremen who doesn't entirely rue the day the Bay Bridge opened. Before the bridge, when ferries were still the principal way of crossing the water, he could expect to be called away from whatever he was doing — be it building a bulkhead or sleeping — at least two or three times a year for emergency repairs.

"We didn't work much when it was rainin', but we worked all night often enough," he says. He seems to be looking back twenty or thirty years and seeing a damaged ferry landing which would require him and his crew to work until dawn, and he doesn't seem to miss that aspect of

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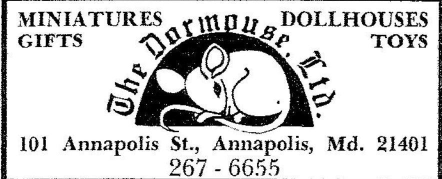

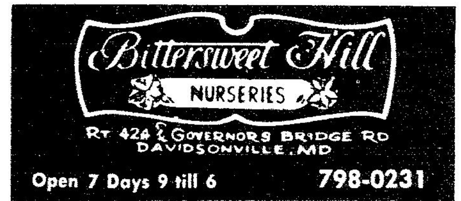

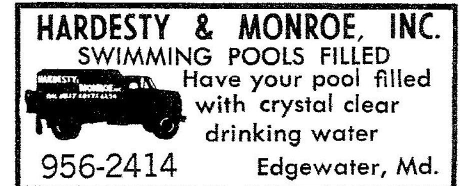

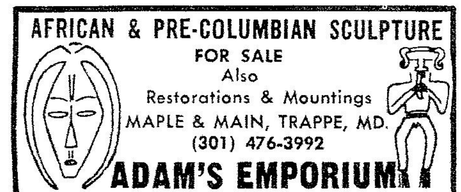

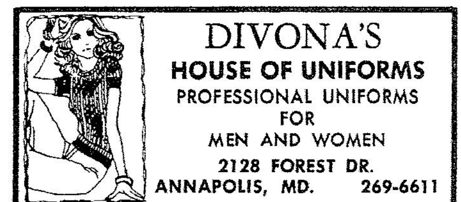

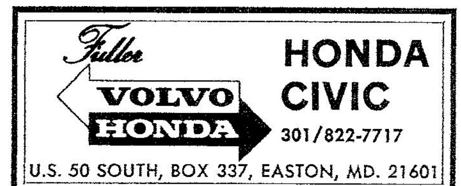

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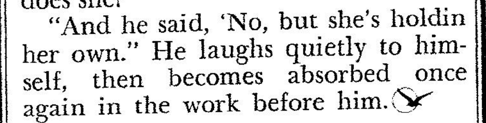
his life's work.

But, thinking back and talking about one time when a ferry called the Ritchie was hung up on some pilings on the western shore, he remembers a story that amuses him.

"I was riding on the Ritchie once, between Claiborne and Romancoke. She had four engines, you know, and there was a pretty good sea, and she wasn't movin."



"I said to the cap'n — I was up on the bridge — I said, 'Cap'n, she doesn't seem to be makin' much headway, does she?'

"And he said, 'No, but she's holdin her own." He laughs quietly to himself, then becomes absorbed once again in the work before him.

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use, he must sell them elsewhere.

"And if he refuses to buy," Mickey Freeman points out, "you can be sure he'll never be invited to another sight!"

The buyer, also known as the "receiver," then sells the gems to the cutter, sometimes called the diamond manufacturer since he manufactures polished goods from rough goods. In the United States 95% of all cutters are located in New York City but most of the world's cutters center in Antwerp, Holland, and Belgium. Once these diamonds are cut they can pass on to the jeweler directly, or, more often, through a series of brokers.

This system, not unlike the manufacture of any other product today, adds cost to the buyer with each transaction along the way. A diamond's price is more directly affected, however, by what are referred to as the "Four C's": clarity, color, cut, and carat weight.

Of all, carat weight is the most obvious. Everyone knows that the larger the carat the more expensive the diamond. Everyone does not know, however, that the larger the stone, the higher the price per carat.

"I may have a flawless, one carat stone worth $7500," explains Oscar Caplan, Jr., "but a two carat stone of the same quality may be worth $20,000."

The reason is simple: big stones are quite rare.

Just as rare, and therefore just as expensive, is the completely colorless diamond. "Color" generally means some shade of white although very expensive diamonds come in all colors of the rainbow.

Clarity implies the degree to which a diamond is free from inclusions, small natural impurities like carbon

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