

tion of this board." Later, on 25 June 1885, the board became more bureaucratic, notifying the deputy commanders that no bills contracted by them would be approved unless accompanied by a properly countersigned requisition from the commander.³⁵

Other complaints against the officers of the Fishery Force had to do with their competence and efficiency, and those, too, had to be heard by the board. At its meetings on 19 and 23 December 1884 the board considered the charge that Captain Franklin of the *Nannie Merryman* had improperly absented himself from the ship and was therefore neglectful of his duty. The board ultimately dismissed the charge, but it did admonish the captain that it "would look to renewed attention to his duties, and a more strict observance of all orders coming from Commander of the Force." Charges against Captain Childs were heard in March 1881, and in June 1884 the board agreed to hear a protest by the first officer of the *Governor Hamilton* against his dismissal.³⁶

All of these naval matters no doubt took up a great deal of time; the board minutes show a substantial preoccupation with them throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Indeed, as late as 1914 the minutes show considerable time and attention being given to the election of officers of the Fishery Force, which became increasingly politicized,³⁷ and to the condition of the fleet, which was not always the best. In addition to fending off citizens' complaints, hearing charges against various officers, and authorizing repairs, the board let contracts for new vessels, employed experts to evaluate the vessels prior to acceptance by the state to ensure that they met performance specifications, dickered with contractors over problems with the boats, ordered equipment for the boats (down to a \$16.30 spy glass), employed watermen to guard vessels seized under the oyster laws, pressed state's attorneys to enforce the law more vigorously, and arranged for the sale of worn-out vessels.³⁸ On 2 July 1884 the members of the board personally inspected the entire fleet, having ordered it to Annapolis for that purpose. They did so again in July 1900.³⁹

In general, it appears that the Board of Public Works discharged these various duties with fairness and compassion, if not with particular diligence. There were constant complaints about the condition of the fleet, and it appears that they often had merit.⁴⁰ The board's general reaction, as noted, was to bring the commander of the fleet in and order him to correct or improve whatever was being complained about. Occasionally the board must have become exasperated with its role as an admiralty board, as witness this excerpt from the minutes for 20 January 1887: "A petition of citizens of the eighth district of Anne Arundel County, asking that they be furnished with a cannon to protect oyster grounds from depredation, was presented to the board and ordered to be filed. The board decide that they have no authority for such proceedings—besides they have no cannon."⁴¹

35. *Ibid.*, 10 July 1884, vol. 1883-1905, p. 21; 29 September 1881, vol. 1851-83, p. 372; 25 June 1885, vol. 1883-1905, p. 44.

36. *Ibid.*, 19, 23 December 1884, vol. 1883-1905, pp. 33-34; 11 March 1881, vol. 1851-83, p. 346; 11 June 1884, vol. 1883-1905, p. 18.

37. See *ibid.*, 15 August 1910, 1:451, for an example of the political interest in the appointment of officers. Some recommendations pointedly carried the endorsement of the Democratic State Central Committee. At this meeting "Senator Dodson, of Talbot County, accompanied by a large delegation from said county appeared before the board to urge the appointment of Owen H. Higgins as Deputy Commander of the 'Eliza Hayward.'" Other luminaries also appeared to support their candidates.

38. See, for example, Acts of 1882, ch. 275, directing the board to sell the *Lelia*—"so decayed that she is unseaworthy"—and to buy or cause to be built two suitable tugs or propellers as replacements.

39. BPW Minutes, 2 July 1884, 20 July 1900, vol. 1883-1905, pp. 20, 272.

40. The minutes for 20 July 1900 show that the board had the fleet brought to Annapolis for inspection and found it to be "in bad condition in all details, the bedding was filthy and in miserable condition, guns, small and large rusty and unfit for use, sails only a year old so neglected as to be very much injured and rigging in bad repair." Commander Howard was ordered to take immediate steps to have the boats put in good repair. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

41. *Ibid.*, 20 January 1887, p. 72.