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A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME HISTORY COUNCIL

# *Tributaries*

OCTOBER 1995

NUMBER 5

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## CONTENTS

<b>The Executive Board .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The North Carolina Maritime History Council .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Shipbuilding and Boatbuilders in Swansboro 1800 – 1950 .....</b>	<b>7</b>
William N. Still, Jr.	
<b>New Topsail Inlet: A Brief History .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Wilson S. Angley	
<b>S. R. Fowle Company: Coastal Trade and Schooners .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Ann Merriman	
<b>A View of History: Learning from the Past .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Compiled by Michael Alford	
<b>North Carolina Register of Historic Vessels .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Books and Reviews .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>ONSLow COUNTY: A BRIEF HISTORY</i> by Alan D. Watson	
<i>SEASONED BY SALT: A HISTORICAL ALBUM OF THE OUTER BANKS</i> by Rodney Barfield	
<i>THE NATURE OF THE OUTER BANKS</i> by Dirk Frankenberg	
<b>Reports from the Field .....</b>	<b>39</b>
PROGRAM IN MARITIME HISTORY AND NAUTICAL ARCHÆOLOGY NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME MUSEUM NORTH CAROLINA UNDERWATER ARCHÆOLOGY UNIT	

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# About the Maritime History Council

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THE NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME HISTORY COUNCIL came together in 1988 when a group of individuals professionally involved in maritime history programs began meeting informally to share information and to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Aware that the sheer size of the state's coastal area, increasingly rapid development, and the variety of coastal waters have tended to fragment efforts to preserve the state's maritime history, the group began to explore ways to pool the resources of disparate state and federal agencies.

The North Carolina Maritime History Council was incorporated in 1990 with the mission to identify and encourage historical and educational projects that have as their purpose the enhancement and preservation of the state's maritime history and culture, and that create public awareness of that heritage.

The council views this heritage in broad perspective, noting that its influence extends to the heads of navigation of the state's rivers.

An example of its accomplishments is the purchase of the Edwin Champney drawings, a collection of fifty-nine sketches of coastal scenes from the Civil War period that were obtained by the council in 1990 using funds donated by the Frank Stick Trust and other nonprofit groups. They are now part of the permanent collections of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History and are administered by the Outer Banks History Center.

The council advises the North Carolina Maritime Museum on the newly instituted N.C. Historic Vessel Register. This journal has been published by the group for the past five years.

Council membership is limited to nonprofit organizations and institutions directly involved in the study and teaching of the state's maritime culture and to selected individuals recognized for outstanding contributions in the field.

Rodney D. Barfield  
Chair



IRENE

SBOR



# Shipbuilding and Boatbuilders in Swansboro 1800 – 1950

by William N. Still, Jr.  
Professor of Maritime History, East Carolina University, Retired

**A**lthough there were settlers living along the White Oak and New rivers early in the eighteenth century, Onslow County was not officially created until 1734, formed out of a portion of New Hanover County.<sup>1</sup> The two rivers were the centers of early settlement just as other rivers and bodies of water were up and down the eastern seaboard. More than likely, vessels were built in Onslow even before the county was formally organized. The concentration of people along the water routes made it inevitable that small craft—row boats, canoes, periaugers, and sailing vessels would be built for local transportation. Dug-out cypress canoes commonly called “kunnners” were probably the first small vessels built in the area. We know very little about early boats, nor for that matter do we know much about the larger vessels built in the county during the colonial period. British records are vague concerning shipbuilding. For example, shipping lists or port records frequently describe vessels as being “plantation built” if they were constructed in any of the colonies including North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> Rarely is there a notation of a vessel being built in a specific locality. An examination of the port records for the British North American and West Indian colonies has uncovered no reference to a vessel noting Onslow County as the place of construction.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, there is considerable evidence to indicate that larger vessels were built in the county. Court records and shipping returns mention vessels owned by Onslow County residents. There are also a few references to ship carpenters and apprentices to ship carpenters in the records. The earliest mention of a shipwright in Onslow County refers to Thomas Harding, a resident of Beaufort County who purchased 540 acres of land in present-day Onslow in 1726. There is no conclusive evidence that he constructed vessels in Onslow, but he may well have. Zae

Gwynn’s *Records of Onslow* lists Lester Roberts as a ship carpenter who owned one hundred acres of land on Smith’s Creek. Gwynn indicates that William Green, listed as a ship carpenter, owned some fifty acres of land on the northeast side of the northwest branch of the New River at Wolf Swamp shortly before the outbreak of the American revolutionary war. There is also an apprentice bond, dated 1767, in the North Carolina State Archives for a twelve-year-old mulatto boy named Moses Spencer, who was bound to James Griffin to learn “the Art and Mystery” of ship carpentry. Griffin was evidently a shipwright in Onslow County but exactly where is unknown. Although the evidence is rather slim it does clearly indicate that there were ship carpenters in Onslow during the colonial period and presumably they practiced their trade. Vessels of some kind were more than likely constructed during the period of the American Revolution as well, but if so the records are silent.

In 1783 a treaty that recognized the independence of the United States was signed with Great Britain. In the years that followed, Swansborough began to emerge as a regional port. Three years after the treaty, the territory trading through Bogue, Bear, and New River inlets was separated from Port Beaufort and organized into a new official port of entry under the name of Swansborough. (The modern spelling, Swansboro, will be used hereafter.)<sup>4</sup> It was during the period between the end of the revolutionary war and the outbreak of the War of 1812 that the importance of Onslow County’s shipbuilding industry began to emerge. In 1807 William Tatham, an agent of the national government sent to survey the coastline between the Chesapeake Bay and the Cape Fear River wrote, “The Town of Swansboro seems to be chiefly employed in shipbuilding for the West India and coasting trade.” He also reported on New River: “but though there has been a ship built here, and towed to sea as light as she could be floated, yet difficulty of passing a shifting bar...seldom admitting six feet of water...is a great prohibition.”<sup>5</sup>

At the time Tatham wrote the above, there were apparently a number of small shipyards in the county. In 1783, Judah Dyer, a shipwright, bought lot number seventeen on Swansboro’s waterfront on the east side of the town. The following year Dyer sold the northern half of the lot to Harrison Adkins, another shipwright. In 1787

**The Irene, a Swansboro boat, is believed to be one of the first boats in the state to be converted to a trawler when the otter trawl was introduced in the area.**

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Tucker Littleton Collection.



the North Carolina Gazette published in New Bern carried this advertisement: "For sale and now ready to be launched at Bogue [one of the several early names for Swansboro] a new vessel, built of live oak and cedar, of the following dimensions—48 or 49 feet keel, 19 feet beam, 7 feet 10 inches hold with double bends....For terms apply to Tidus Ogden." In 1791 a petition for clearing obstructions from New River mentioned the "Howards Shipyard" located on the river. There are also a number of documents in the North Carolina State Archives mentioning shipwright apprentices. In 1797 James Kellum took an orphan named William Yewell to be "learned the art of shipbuilding." In 1800 John Weks, also an orphan, was bound to Andrew Wilson, a ship carpenter in Swansboro. An entry in one of the Onslow County deed books lists George M. Adamson as a ship carpenter in 1797.

Between 1783 and 1812, at least twenty-three ocean-going vessels were built in the county, thirteen schooners, six brigantines, and two ship-rigged vessels of approximately three hundred tons each. Two-thirds of these ships, including all of the large ones, were built in Swansboro. Three were Onslow County with no specific location, one Bear Banks, one Bear Creek, one White Oak River, and one Snead's Ferry.<sup>6</sup>

The outbreak of the War of 1812 resulted in a British

**Cabin boats like this were commonly used to travel between the mainland and the Banks, and to carry mail and supplies.**

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Tucker Littleton Collection.

blockade of the United States coastline including North Carolina. The resulting decline in maritime trade inevitably slowed ship construction. Only three vessels, all built in Swansboro, have been recorded for the war years. These may have been privateers.<sup>7</sup> One was a schooner named the *Paul Jones*, a second, another schooner, the *Salmagundi*, and the third a large ship (no name given) of approximately six hundred tons, much too large for the normal coastal or West Indian trade. She was ninety feet in length, thirty-five feet in beam, built out of cedar and live oak.

When the war ended in 1815, trade revived rapidly and so did shipbuilding. In the years between 1815 and the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, available records indicate that at least thirty-five ocean-going sailing vessels and two steamboats were built in Onslow County. The overwhelming majority of the sailing vessels, thirty in all, were two-masted schooners, several of which were over two hundred tons. Four brigs and one sloop were also built during this period. Onslow County shipbuilding during this period mirrors the national trend.

The sloop had been the most popular vessel type built in the eighteenth century; in the nineteenth century it was the schooner.

Swansboro was still the center of construction in the county with nearly half of the above vessels being built there. Eight were constructed on New River, one each on the White Oak River and at Bogue Inlet, and eleven others are listed for the county.

Builders in the county in the pre-Civil War years included Caden Cooper, who owned a tract of land in the Stump Sound area, Eden Bell, and Captain Eden Morse. Morse was a prominent mariner, merchant, and ship-builder whose business enterprises were located in Swansboro in the 1820s and early 1830s, and later on New River. In 1833 he sold his shipyard in Swansboro and established a store and shipyard on the northeast branch of New River. Although he apparently constructed a number of vessels, we know the names of only two: the schooner *Caleb Nichols*, launched in 1833, and the brig *Carolina*, launched the following year. Both vessels were built on New River.

Morse may have built one of two steamboats constructed in Onslow County before the Civil War. In 1836 a sidewheeler, the *David W. St. John*, 199 tons, was built at New River and later taken to Savannah, Georgia, where she was used in the river trade until being scrapped in 1844.

The other steamboat built in Onslow County before the Civil War had the distinction of being the first steam

vessel built in North Carolina. In 1818, eleven years after Robert Fulton built the first commercially successful steamboat in the world, Captain Otway Burns, the famous privateersman, constructed the *Prometheus* at Swansboro. Although tradition has it that the *Prometheus* was built in Beaufort, there is adequate evidence to prove that the sternwheel steamer was built in Swansboro. The building site was on the water portion of lot number six, purchased by Burns in 1810. The machinery and engines were fabricated in Boston, and shipped to Swansboro to be assembled. She was launched on May 6, 1818, but due to heavy gales did not leave Swansboro until the first of June. She was built to carry passengers and cargo between Wilmington and Smithville (now Southport) on the Cape Fear River. Her life span was only six years, being accidentally burned and abandoned in 1825.

Although only two steamboats were built in Onslow County before the Civil War, a puzzling fact considering their potential usefulness on the White Oak River, a total of thirty five were constructed in the state for river trade. The typical North Carolina river boat at that time, unlike the western river vessel, was plain and practical. It had a narrow flat-bottomed hull, with a pilot house and passenger cabin on the upper decks, and an engine room aft and boiler room forward on the main deck. The cargo was usually stowed between the latter two structures.<sup>8</sup>

An examination of the unpublished census records for North Carolina counties for the pre-Civil War years indicates that shipbuilding was listed as an occupation by individuals in all of the coastal counties. For Onslow, none were listed in the census' of 1840 and 1850, but two, Samuel Wiley and Ross Moore, were listed in 1860. Wiley was apparently a builder in Swansboro; Moore is listed as building in the county.<sup>9</sup>

### **The *Irene* before conversion to a fishing trawler.**

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Tucker Littleton Collection.



The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 affected maritime activities in Onslow as it did in the other coastal counties. Federal troops did not permanently occupy the county, although raiding parties penetrated the region. Because of the blockade and Union control of the North Carolina sounds and the port of Norfolk, Virginia, the county's maritime trade virtually ceased. Shipbuilding followed suit; there is no evidence that any vessels were built in the county during the war years. It is possible, of course, that small craft for local use were constructed.

The decline in shipbuilding continued in the post war years, as it did elsewhere. This was particularly true for ocean-going vessels. Various reasons explain this decline. The West Indian trade virtually disappeared as larger vessels from Charleston, Norfolk, and other port cities took it over. The coastal trade also declined. More and more vessels were using canals such as the Albemarle and Chesapeake and other inland waterways to avoid the dangerous outside voyage around Cape Hatteras. As far as Swansboro was concerned, the inlets, particularly Bogue, were subject to silting, and until they were dredged by the Army Corps of Engineers, were of little use for vessels going outside.

In 1866, three schooners, the *May Queen*, *Susan*, and *Willie B.*, were built in Swansboro, perhaps in anticipation of a resumption of trade. A prosperous maritime commerce never occurred, however; for the remainder of the century only five other ocean-going sailing vessels were built in the county. Three of these (all schooners) were built in Swansboro, one on New River, and the other somewhere in the county. In 1877 an article in the *Wilmington Star* mentioned Swansboro as a "delightful place...[with] about 500 inhabitants", and went on to say, "there is one shipyard on a small scale" in the town. Probably this was the Edwards and Hall shipyard that built at least two schooners in the 1870s, the *Minnie Ward* and the *Katie Edwards*.

New River remained a distant second to Swansboro in ship construction. In the 1870s a flatbottom centerboard vessel known as a sharpie was introduced into eastern North Carolina. Because this type of vessel was well suited to North Carolina's shoal waterways, it rapidly became the most popular sailing vessel in Carteret, Craven, and Onslow counties. Sharpies were used in fishing and oystering and in carrying freight. A great many were built on New River. In 1899 an officer of the Corps of Engineers in a report concerning New River wrote, "The ocean going commerce is very small, carried mostly in large sharpies and boats of about 15 tons...." Typical of the New River sharpies was one constructed by A. L. Willis. According to the *New Bern Daily News* in 1882, it was a forty-five-foot schooner built to carry cargo on New River.

In the 1880s steamboats began to ply the White Oak River for the first time. In the seventies and eighties the

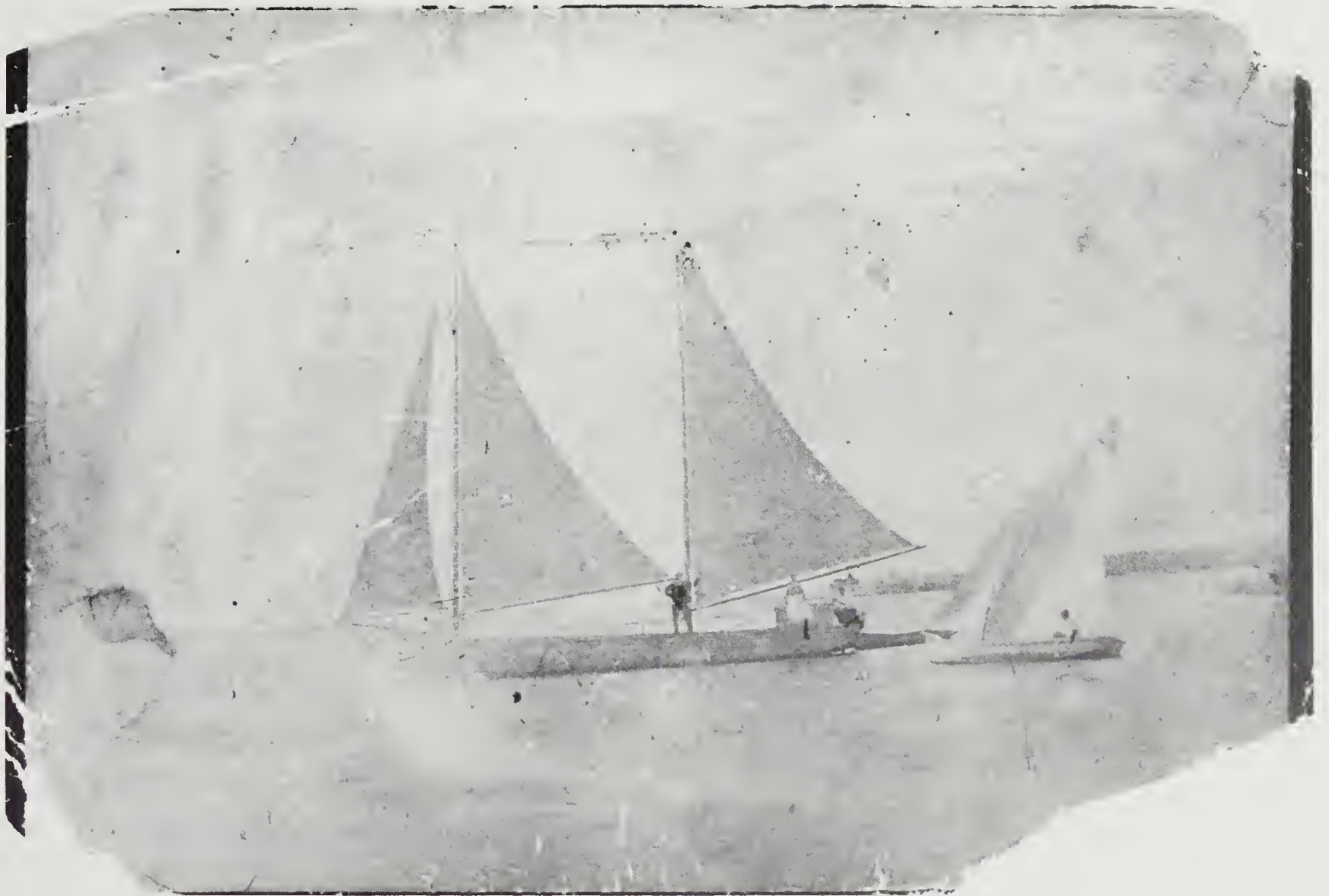
need for a railroad and steamboats was a popular topic with the farmers, fishermen, and businessmen in Swansboro and along the White Oak River. Hopes that a new railroad from New Bern to Wilmington would provide them with adequate transportation were dashed when the railroad passed through Maysville, some five miles above where navigation ended on the White Oak. Despite their efforts, no tracks were laid to link the river with the main line. However, they were more successful in obtaining water transportation.

In 1883 the steamer *Tarboro*, built in Washington, North Carolina, was sold to a transportation company in Swansboro and placed in operation on the White Oak. In 1887 a second steamer, the *Minnie B.*, was launched at Stella. She was built by Hilery Terry, a businessman from New Bedford, Massachusetts, who migrated to North Carolina in the eighties where he established several sawmills, including one at Stella.<sup>10</sup> While the steam sawmill was under construction at Stella, Terry hired Washington Willis, a "master builder" and ten "first class ship carpenters." They built a shipyard including what a Beaufort newspaper called "the first elevated marine railway in the state."<sup>11</sup> In addition to the *Minnie B.*, several scows including the *City of Stella*, *Maggie*, *Eldridge*, and *Cary Lumber* were constructed at the Stella shipyard. The *Minnie B.* towed the scows with cargoes of lumber to Morehead City and Bogue Inlet where it was loaded onto schooners and steamers to be carried to northern ports. Apparently the shipyard lasted only a few years before being closed down. Terry later became the town's postmaster.

The *Tarboro* and *Minnie B.* inaugurated an era in which the Swansboro-White Oak region's transportation system was primarily steam and gasoline boats carrying freight and passengers to and from Morehead City and New Bern. Between 1882 and 1925 the region was serviced by at least twenty different gasoline or steam vessels, many of which were built in the county, probably the majority in Swansboro. According to a *Wilmington* newspaper there were two shipbuilders in Swansboro at the turn of the century, Edward Hill and Reinhold Foster. Hill was a Swansboro native who had been building vessels since the Civil War. Two of his sons, Monte and Ed Jr., would also become shipbuilders.

Reinhold Foster was a native of Germany who immigrated to the United States in the 1870s. He worked at shipyards in New York and New Jersey before moving to Swansboro in 1886. He probably launched his first vessel, the sharpie *Edwin*, the following year and continued building until he died. His son, Joseph, would erect the first marine railway in Swansboro.

The 1903 *North Carolina Yearbook* mentions another builder in Swansboro, Van Buren Willis. He was born in 1861 in the Marshallberg area of Carteret County and evidently built vessels there before moving to Swansboro. Local legend has it that he was the first



**A two-masted sailing boat built by Reinhold Joseph Foster.**

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Tucker Littleton Collection.

builder in the county to build lapstrake-style boats. Along with his son, Isiah, he would continue building vessels until he died in 1925.

Swansboro builders were busy during these years. The *Nina*, a screw steamboat, was constructed by the Swansboro Lumber Company in 1897. That same year a barge was also completed in the town, probably by the same company. During a five year period between 1899 and 1904, nine vessels were built in the town including two sloops, the *Carrie* and *Sarah*; three schooners, the *Georgia T.*, *Nellie*, and *Nellie B.*; a barge; two gasoline powered vessels, the *Lena* and *Roslynd*; and a steam tug, the *Fawn*.

We know less about shipbuilding in the New River area at the turn of the century. Louis C. Brown of Gilletts mentioned in a letter dated 1906 that he built vessels near the Snead's ferry. In the small community of Marine, which ceased to exist with the construction of Camp LeJeune, several individuals were involved in boat and shipbuilding. Walter Marine built a two-masted schooner, the *Roamer*, in 1902. Luther Harrison, also of Marine, constructed several vessels including houseboats, sail-

boats, and gasoline powered boats. Steam powered vessels were not built on New River at that time, nor would any be built in later years.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, steam powered vessels began to disappear on the nation's rivers, including those in North Carolina. The *Lallah* and *Fawn* were the last steamers built in Onslow County. Both were propeller driven and were used to haul lumber barges.

Gasoline powered boats were built in the county as early as 1906. The application of gasoline engines to fishing vessels was a major factor in the development of the state's ocean fishing industry. Before the Civil War the only vessels built solely for fishing were small row-boats, skiffs, canoes, and the flats used in the Albemarle Sound herring fishery. In the post-Civil War years commercial fishing became increasingly profitable, with improvements in transportation providing a means of getting the harvested seafood to market, and the importation of ice from the Northeast providing a means of preservation. Although available records do not designate vessels that were built specifically for fishing until the twentieth century, the construction of an increasing number of small sailing craft under twenty-five tons suggests a transition from trading to fishing vessels.

In the northeastern part of the state, the Albemarle Sound shad boat and its variants became the most popular

small sailing craft used for fishing, and in Carteret and Onslow counties, it was the sharpie. The first powered fishing vessels were small steam flats built in the 1880s to carry huge seines out in Albemarle Sound. Then came the adoption of the outboard motor early in the twentieth century, and in the 1920s the adaptation of automobile engines to fishing craft. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the construction of fishing vessels dominated the state's shipbuilding industry, including Onslow County. The majority of these craft, however, were constructed by fishermen or individual builders. The 1910 census lists only ten small shipyards in the state employing a total of sixty-six workers, of which only one was in Onslow.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly before the First World War the so-called "otter trawl" was introduced into North Carolina's shrimping industry.<sup>13</sup> This would lead to the development of the type of commercial fishing boat popularly known as the trawler. The earliest trawlers were open boats ranging from fifteen to twenty feet long, powered by small gasoline engines. By the early twenties the first decked trawlers were in use. Exactly when the first trawlers were built in Onslow County is unclear. It probably was in the late 1920s or early 1930s. By the beginning of the Second World War there were more than twenty-five trawlers in the county, a large percentage of them home-ported in the Snead's Ferry area. By then trawlers up to thirty and forty

feet were being built in the county. In the late thirties some of the larger ones were being equipped with power winches for hauling in the trawls.

The development of the gasoline engine and its adaptation to waterborne craft also led to the introduction of small craft designed specifically for sport or recreational fishing. Prior to the 1920s nearly all recreational fishing afloat was confined to the sounds, rivers, and inland waters.

Offshore fishing probably started in the late twenties when a few individuals began to go out to the Gulf Stream in search of amberjack, albacore, wahoo, bonita, barracuda, blue marlin, and red snapper. Again we are not sure when sport fishermen and party boats were first built in Onslow County, but by the mid-thirties several had been built and placed in operation. By that time county shipbuilders were constructing both commercial and sport fishing craft.

The most prominent boat builders in the county between the two world wars were Ralph Gornto at Marine; Ralph Gillette on New River near Snead's Ferry; Alex Moore, Walker Rowe, Robert Lee Smith, John Riggs, Monte Lee Hill, and Isiah Willis at Swansboro; and the Matthews brothers in the Bear Creek community.

**The *Ave Maria* was built for Charlie Russell by Van Buren Willis.**

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh. Tucker Littleton Collection.



Gornito operated a small marine railway near Marine where he built both small craft and seagoing vessels. Robert Lee Smith was a foreman at a large shipbuilding company in Morehead City during the First World War. After the war he moved to Swansboro where, according to his daughter, he built sailing vessels, fishing boats, runabouts, speedboats, and skiffs for nearly two decades.

Alex Moore built two well-known yachts, or passenger vessels as *Merchant Vessels of the United States* (U.S. Bureau of Statistics) designated them. These were the thirty-seven-foot *Tangier*, built in 1926, and the *Sonny Boy*, completed in 1935. Walker Rowe specialized in small pleasure craft. In an interview with the author a number of years ago, Rowe claimed to have been the first to put slanted windshields on small runabouts. On Deer Island, John Riggs built several vessels, including the *Hazel* and *Wedge*. Another technological innovation for small craft claimed by an Onslow builder, Lindsey Matthews of Bear Creek, was the “well,” a watertight box around an opening in the bottom of a boat where an outboard motor was placed. Today this feature is found on hundreds of small fishing boats world wide.

Without question the best known shipbuilders in Onslow County from 1920 to 1950 were Monte Hill and his cousin, Isiah Willis. The Hill and Willis families are good examples of how a skill was passed on from one generation to the next. Monte’s father, Ed Hill, was a ship carpenter in the late nineteenth century and taught the business to both his sons, Monte and Ed, Jr. Monte was born in 1880 and built vessels until shortly before his death in 1956. Isiah Willis worked with his father, Van Buren Willis, for many years. In 1919 they constructed the thirty-nine-foot *Ida*, a large fishing boat for that period. Later they built the *Edith* and *Ava Maria*. When Van Buren died in 1926 Isiah formed a partnership with Monte Hill. They were cousins. In their small workshop on the Swansboro waterfront they built vessels from twelve to fifty feet in length. Like most North Carolina boatbuilders of the period, their boats were designed and built without the use of blueprints or plans. The number they constructed is unknown. One interviewer estimated over a hundred. Among them were the *Thelma*, *Hammock*, *Billie Jean*, *Etta Lee*, *Eva*, *Clara B.* (later renamed the *Sally D.*), *Edith*, *Ranger*, *Douglas*, *Jim-Pat*, *Estelle*, *Four Winds*, *Rita L.*, and *Sandpiper*.

In recent years there has been little boatbuilding in the county. Occasionally fishermen build vessels for their own use, but professional shipbuilding and boatbuilding as practiced by Isiah Willis and Monte Hill have nearly died out. Fiberglass has dominated small boat construction for the past quarter century, yet commercial fishermen insist that as long as the fishing industry is economically attractive, wooden boats will be needed. Perhaps one of these days another Monte Hill or Isiah Willis will begin building fine wooden boats in Onslow County. ■

## NOTES

1. A version of this paper was read in 1983 at a symposium to commemorate Swansboro’s 200th Anniversary. Much of the information upon which this paper is based comes from the author’s interviews with descendants of the builders mentioned in the text and from Roger Kammerer and the late Tucker Littleton. For background on Onslow County see Joseph P. Brown, *The Commonwealth of Onslow: A History* (New Bern, N.C.: Owen G. Dunn, 1960); Tucker R. Littleton, “A Civilian History of the Camp LeJeune Area,” (unpublished report, 1981), copy in the Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C. See also Richard A. Stephenson and William N. Still, Jr., eds., *The Submerged Cultural Resources of Swansboro* (Greenville, N.C.: East Carolina University, Program in Maritime History and Nautical Archæology, 1994).
2. William N. Still, Jr., “Shipbuilding in North Carolina: A Case Study in the South’s Maritime Heritage, in *Shipbuilding and Trade 1750–1950, Essays in International Maritime Economic History*, eds. Lewis B. Fisher and Helge W. Nordvik (Pontefract, England: Lofthouse, 1990), 251–259.
3. Many of these records are on microfilm in the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.
4. Swansborough was the name of the first town in Onslow County to be incorporated under a charter from the General Assembly in 1783. See Walter Clark, ed., *The State Records of North Carolina*, 16 vols. (11–26) (Winston and Goldsboro, N.C.: State of North Carolina, 1895–1907), XXIV:534–535. Legislation in 1877 and 1895 renewed the town’s incorporation with its present spelling, Swansboro. See *Laws of North Carolina, 1876–1877*, c. 92; *Laws of North Carolina, 1895*, c. 207.
5. William Tatham, “The Separate Report of William Tatham, one of the Commissioners appointed to survey the Coast of North Carolina,” manuscript in the library of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Washington, D.C.
6. Compiled from a variety of records and documents including *List of American Flag Merchant Vessels That Received Certificates of Enrollment or Registry at the Port of New York*, 2 vols., (Washington, D.C.: 1968); and U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, *Certificates of Enrollments and Registry issued at North Carolina Ports, 1815–1911*, Record Group 41, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
7. Sarah Lemmon in *Frustrated Patriots: North Carolina and the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), mentions four privateers that were North Carolina owned, but none from Swansboro. See page 154.
8. William N. Still, Jr., “The Shipbuilding Industry in Washington, North Carolina,” in *Of Tar Heel Towns, Shipbuilders, Reconstructionists and Alliancemen: Papers in North Carolina History*, ed. Joseph F. Steelman (Greenville, N.C.: 1981), 34.
9. Federal censuses of North Carolina for 1840, 1850 and 1860, microfilm copies in Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.
10. Known as Barkers Bridge at that time.
11. This was not correct; there were marine railways at Wilmington, New Bern, Elizabeth City and Washington.
12. The Onslow yard was not identified.
13. William N. Still, Jr., “A History of the Shrimping Industry in North Carolina,” *The American Neptune* (fall, 1987), 257–274.

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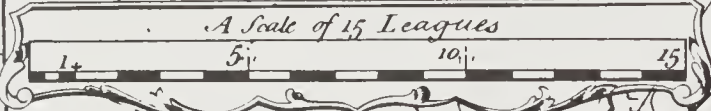
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# New Topsail Inlet: A Brief History

by Wilson S. Angley

Research Branch, Division of Archives and History

**N**ew Topsail Inlet is located along the coast of Pender County at the lower end of Topsail Beach. Through this inlet the waters of the Atlantic Ocean communicate with those of Topsail Sound. The nearest other inlets are New River Inlet to the north and Old Topsail Inlet to the south.

The shoreline of Topsail Sound in the vicinity of New Topsail Inlet was settled during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. One of the earliest land grants in the area was for eight hundred acres to John Baptista Ashe in 1726, "being the banks between Stumpy Sound and New Topsail Inlet."<sup>1</sup> It was about this same time, also, that the first representatives of the Nixon family began to take up lands along Topsail Sound.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the Moseley Map of 1733 clearly displays the name "Nixon" directly opposite the inlet.<sup>3</sup> The Wimble Map of 1738 recorded the existence of several plantations in close proximity to the inlet; and this same map's depiction of an anchorage point just inside the inlet indicates that already it was being used as an artery of coastal trade.<sup>4</sup> By the time of the American Revolution, members of the Bishop, Price, Morris, and Harrison families had also established themselves along the nearby shoreline of Topsail Sound.<sup>5</sup>

As early as 1755 New Topsail Sound was designated as an official inspection point for export commodities in New Hanover County, along with Brunswick, Wilmington, and New Exeter.<sup>6</sup> It was similarly designated in subsequent legislation of 1758, 1764, and 1770.<sup>7</sup> In 1784 New Topsail Inlet was designated the point of inspection for the Topsail Sound area. Export commodities for which inspection was required included "beef, pork, rice, tar, pitch and turpentine, staves and heading, fish, flour, butter, flax-seed, sawed lumber and shingles."<sup>8</sup> The Wimble Map of 1738 and the Mouzon Map of 1775 both indicate that New Topsail Inlet had a depth of ten feet, presumably at high water. Such a depth was more than sufficient for the passage of small sloops and schooners. These and other early maps also indicate that

the position of the inlet remained relatively stable throughout the colonial period.<sup>9</sup>

Despite New Topsail Inlet's long use as an artery of commerce, the volume of trade passing through it was severely limited by the shallowness of adjoining sounds and by its lack of direct communication with the mouth of a large navigable stream, such as the New and White Oak rivers to the north. In 1838 Lieutenant Colonel James Kearney of the Bureau of Topographical Engineers cited the shallowness of the sounds of southeastern North Carolina in opposition to an early and as yet impractical proposal to improve navigation between Beaufort and Wilmington:

I am of opinion that the improvement of the sound of North Carolina, as a general channel of communication for the coasting-trade should not extend to the westward of Beaufort. These sounds are very shallow; and beyond Swansboro they are generally filled with marshes, through which wind narrow, tortuous creeks, in which we find occasional shoals, incapable of floating at low tide a whale-boat with her crew on board.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century members of the Alexander and Holmes families had joined the Nixons, Howards, and other earlier residents of the Topsail Sound area roughly opposite New Topsail Inlet. Indeed, in 1845 Charles H. Alexander acquired some 75 acres of beach property on both sides of the inlet, in addition to his land along the sound. In 1859 Owen Holmes received grants for 76 acres on the upper side of the inlet and some 361 acres of land between New Topsail and Old Topsail inlets.<sup>11</sup> By the time of the Civil War, the point of land directly opposite New Topsail Inlet had become a local shipping point known as Holmes Landing. The inlet at this time was roughly three thousand feet wide, with an island situated just inside its mouth and another, much larger one slightly to the north.<sup>12</sup>

During the Civil War, New Topsail Inlet saw limited but significant use by vessels running the Union blockade of the lower coastline of North Carolina. Moreover, at least two extensive Confederate salt works were situated along the shoreline of Topsail Sound, readily accessible to shallow draft vessels passing through the inlet. A military map drawn in 1864 clearly shows that these salt works were situated on either side of Holmes Landing.<sup>13</sup>

## Wimble map 1738

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Apparently, both of these facilities had been rebuilt since their destruction by Union troops in separate raids in the fall of 1862 and the late summer of 1863. Both raids were the work of the dashing Union naval officer, Lieutenant William B. Cushing. In a letter of 1 November 1862, Cushing furnished his commanding officer with an account of his first mission, presumably involving the facility later rebuilt to the west of Holmes Landing:

Sir: I have the honor to report I again visited New Topsail Inlet on the 29th of October. Three-fourths of a mile from the mouth I discovered a large salt work, and went ashore with an armed party to destroy it. I found that a great deal of labor had been expended in its construction, and think it could have furnished all Wilmington with salt.

We tore down the brickwork, destroyed their large copper and iron kettles and pans, cut holes in their flat boats and lighters, cut through the cisterns and water-works, and burned the buildings; 10 or 15 bushels of salt that had been made that morning I turned into the ditch. The people belonging to the works escaped...I sounded for a channel this time and found that vessels drawing nine feet of water can go up the inlet for three-fourths of a mile. I shall keep a bright lookout for rebel trade at that point.<sup>14</sup>

On the 22nd of August 1863 Cushing destroyed the second salt works on Topsail Sound, apparently the one later rebuilt to the east of Holmes Landing. This he accomplished only after putting to flight a small but superior Confederate force at the site.<sup>15</sup>

At least three vessels were lost at or near New Topsail Inlet during the Civil War; and at least one other vessel was captured in the general vicinity. Still another ship was sunk only slightly up the coast, just west of Stump Inlet. On 22 October 1862, one week prior to his destruction of the Confederate salt works, Lieutenant William B. Cushing reported the seizure and scuttling of the richly laden schooner *Adelaide* inside New Topsail Inlet. Cushing had steamed southward aboard the USS *Ellis* in response to reports of Confederate shipping activity:

Having blockaded Bogue Inlet for two days, I went to sea and steamed to the southward. I learned while at Beaufort that trade was carried on at New Topsail Inlet, and it was to that point that I was bound. I entered the inlet at full speed, found it not fortified, and saw a large schooner about a mile from the mouth. I had no pilot for these waters, but succeeded in getting to within 100 yards of her before grounding. In the meantime the crew left her, after having first kindled a small fire on the quarter-deck; this was soon extinguished and the vessel found uninjured. The prize proved to be the *Adelaide* of Halifax, with about 600 bar-

rels of spirits of turpentine in the hold and 36 bales of cotton and some tobacco for a deck load. The captain carried with him his papers and flag.

I at once directed my attention to securing the prize, but had to remain by her all night, as it was late when I captured her. At 4 o'clock the next morning I took her in tow, but she drew three feet more water than the *Ellis* and grounded incessantly. I continued at work on the schooner until 8 o'clock, when the tide got so low that I could not take her to sea. I therefore reluctantly fired her in the hold amongst the turpentine, and before I left the inlet the barrels were exploding and the flame was at her mastheads. I have several reasons for thinking that a large trade is carried on at this point.<sup>16</sup>

Little more than a week after the *Adelaide's* destruction came the capture of the schooner *Racer* near New Topsail Inlet. The *Racer*, a blockade runner out of Nassau, was spotted on the morning of 30 October by the crew of the USS *Daylight*, which was en route from Hampton Roads to its station off Wilmington. In order to avoid capture, the crew of the *Racer* allowed her to drift ashore along Topsail Beach and then abandoned ship. The cargo was found to consist principally of salt. She was subsequently re-floated by the *Daylight's* crew, and was later taken to New York.<sup>17</sup>

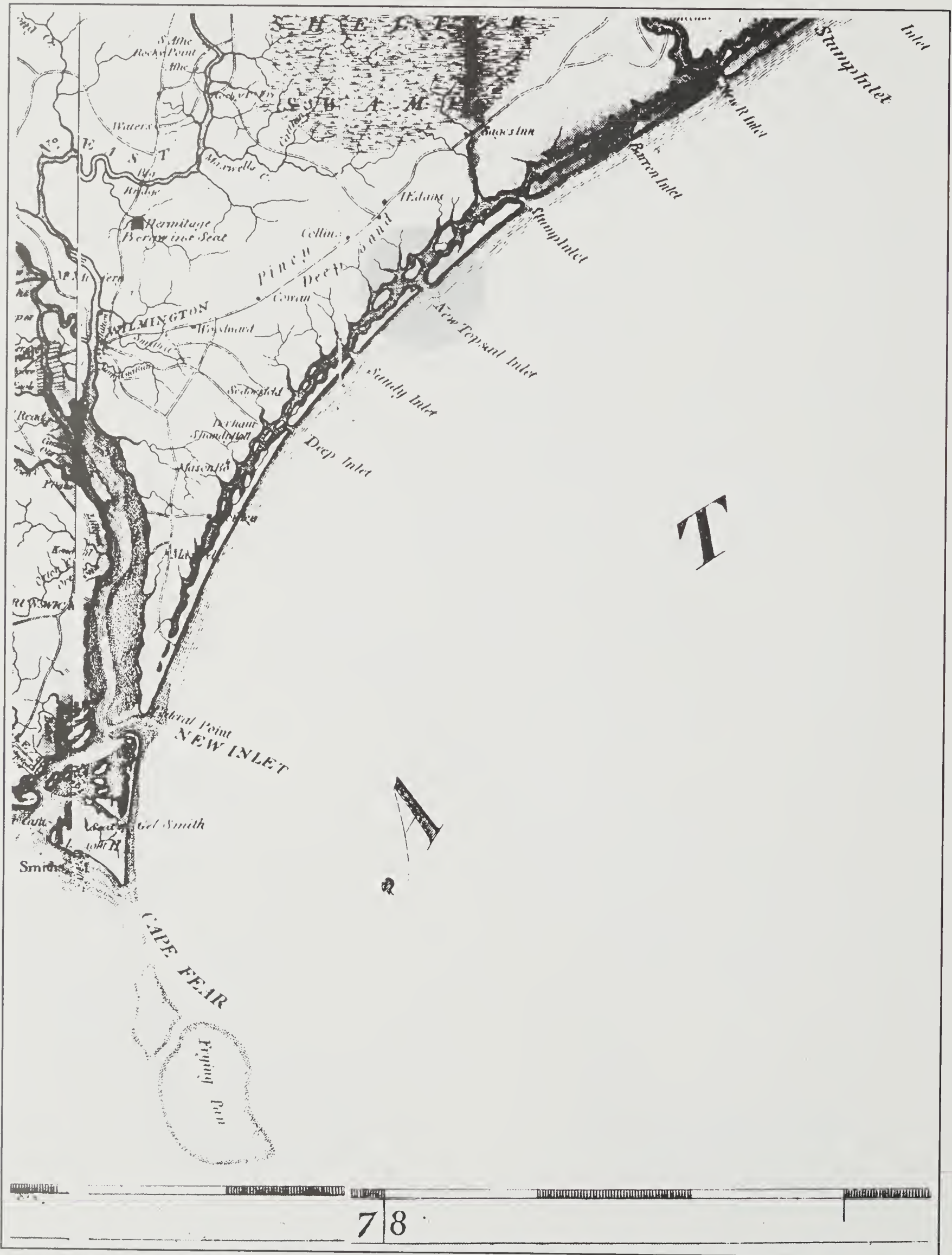
On 21 January 1863 the captain and crew of the *Daylight* struck another blow against Confederate shipping by chasing ashore and destroying an unidentified vessel "a little to the westward of Stump Inlet." This vessel was described as "a large fore-and-aft schooner, deep loaded." Some twenty-five direct hits from the *Daylight's* guns left the schooner "completely riddled and full of water." A subsequent viewing of the vessel revealed that it had been dashed to pieces in the surf.<sup>18</sup>

On 2 February 1863 the USS *Mount Vernon*, under Captain James Trathen, destroyed another vessel engaged in running the blockade for the Confederacy. In a letter of the following day he reported the incident to his commanding officer, Rear Admiral S. P. Lee of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, based at Hampton Roads:

Sir: I have the honor to report to you that...while cruising about five miles to the northward of New Topsail Inlet, and about five miles from land, I discovered a schooner close inshore carrying all sail and standing to the southward. I immediately stood in chase, and on nearing the schooner discovered that she was within 100 yards of the beach, and that her crew had abandoned her and landed on the beach with their boat. I at once cleared away our boats and the schooner was soon boarded by Acting Masters White and Buck and Acting Ensign Paine. Upon boarding her, they found her to be a schooner of about 200 tons burden, loaded with



Collet map 1770 Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.



Price-Strother map 1808 Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

salt. The weather looking threatening, and finding that the crew had taken everything of value with them, they set her on fire and returned to the ship.

Finding that she did not burn very fast, I sent another boat under Acting Ensign Paine, who scuttled her, and shortly afterwards she sunk in about three fathoms of water. The word "Industry" could be read upon her stern. Both hull and sails were unseaworthy.<sup>19</sup>

The last vessel known to have been sunk or captured in the vicinity of New Topsail Inlet during the Civil War was the blockade running schooner *Alexander Cooper*. Once again, it was Lieutenant William B. Cushing who served as the Confederates' nemesis, on this occasion in command of the USS *Shokokon*. On 25 August 1863 Cushing reported to Rear Admiral Lee the destruction of the *Alexander Cooper* and of the nearby salt works, as well. It is clear from his report that New Topsail Inlet and the shores of Topsail Sound had been guarded at the time by Confederate artillery and infantry, albeit somewhat faintheartedly:

Sir: I have the honor to report that we have destroyed the blockade running schooner *Alexander Cooper* under the following circumstances.

On the 12th I made a reconnaissance with boats in New Topsail Inlet opposite the mouth, but not before I had discovered a schooner at a wharf some six miles up the sound. The schooner I determined to destroy, and as it was so well guarded I concluded to use strategy. On the evening of the 22nd the *Shokokon* anchored close into the sea beach about five miles from the inlet and I sent ashore two boats' crews, who shouldered the dingy and carried it across the neck of land that divides the sea from the sound...The crossing placed my men some miles in the rear of the artillery guarding the entrance...While the rebels at the schooner's mastheads were straining their eyes in looking to the southward, my boat was approaching in the other direction, and the men succeeded in landing about 50 yards from the wharf, without being discovered. The master at arms, Robert Clifford, crept into the rebel camp and counted the men, and having returned to his shipmates, a charge was ordered, and our 7 men bore down on them with a shout. In a moment the enemy, who outnumbered us 3 to 1, were routed, leaving in Mr. Cony's possession 10 prisoners,...one 12 pounder army howitzer, 18 horses, one schooner, and some extensive salt works.

Mr. Cony then threw out two pickets, detailed two men to guard the prisoners, and with the remaining 2 fired the vessel and salt works; these were thoroughly consumed...While this was going on at the mainland, my pickets on the beach...

engaged and repulsed the rebel picket force in that quarter without loss on our side.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the vessels lost during the Civil War, at least one other vessel came to grief in the vicinity of New Topsail Inlet in the nineteenth century. This vessel was the schooner *Superior*, which was driven ashore near the inlet on 24 November 1841.<sup>21</sup> Another vessel, the schooner *Mary Bear*, is said by some sources to have been cast away at New Topsail Inlet on 9 September 1881. A contemporary area newspaper, however, states that the *Mary Bear* came ashore five miles south of New River Inlet on "Stump Beach."<sup>22</sup>

An examination of the sounds of southeastern North Carolina in 1875 again focused attention on the impediments to navigation, especially between Swansboro and Wilmington. Moreover, from the report submitted by civil engineer S. T. Albert, it would appear that passage through these sounds had grown progressively more difficult, even for the smallest of vessels:

Between Bogue Sound and Wilmington are five shallow sounds, with an occasional inlet, where coasters may find haven. These sounds...are for the most part occupied by an intricate network of channels through which a canoe cannot pass. The storms sweep into the sounds a large amount of sand which the feeble backwater is unable to remove, and large deltas have been formed by the ocean inside the inlets.<sup>23</sup>

In the process of gathering information for his report, Albert was also informed of a general and progressive beach erosion:

Local testimony seems to indicate that the beach is washing away between New River and Masonborough, and some residents affirm that the beach has retreated as much as one-eighth of a mile in the last twenty years.<sup>24</sup>

Cartographic evidence indicates that New Topsail inlet migrated significantly to the north during much of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this movement seems to have begun in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. A close comparison of the Mouzon Map of 1775 and the Price-Strother Map of 1808 indicates that a northward migration of approximately two miles had occurred between these dates. No further movement is evinced by the Mac Rae-Brazier Map of 1833; but the U.S. Coast Survey Map of 1865 shows that an additional migration northward of approximately two miles had taken place. Thus, although the inlet appears to have remained relatively stable throughout the colonial period, a total movement northward of approximately four miles occurred between the American Revolution and the Civil War. The Kerr-Cain Map of 1882 and the Post Route Map of 1896,

however, indicate that the migration process abated during the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

The rather detailed U.S. Coast Survey Map of the Topsail Sound area done in 1885 shows that New Topsail Inlet was approximately three thousand feet in width. Banks Channel, the principal interior channel, led eastward from the inlet along the back side of Topsail Beach to Sloop Point and the mouth of

Virginia Creek. The approach westward from the inlet to Old Topsail Creek and the Old Point area was through the smaller and more circuitous Howard Channel.<sup>26</sup>

Until the 1920s Beaufort was the southern terminus of the Intracoastal Waterway along the Atlantic seaboard. South of Beaufort the waterway resumed at Winyah Bay, South Carolina, from which point it extended to Jacksonville, Florida. Completion of the projected link of the waterway between Beaufort and Wilmington was expected to result in the shipment of large quantities of lumber, seafood, fertilizer, petroleum products, and general merchandise through the intervening sounds.<sup>27</sup>

The ninety-three mile section of the Intracoastal Waterway between Beaufort and the Cape Fear south of Wilmington was completed in 1932. The channel, initially twelve feet deep and ninety feet wide, extends to this day through Topsail Sound and between New Topsail Inlet and the mainland. Vessel traffic on the Beaufort to Cape Fear section increased from 33,710 tons in 1932 to 243,000 tons in 1939. In 1938 this traffic consisted of approximately 8,500 motor vessels, 200 barges, and 300 tugs—a total of about 9,000 vessel trips. As anticipated, cargo consisted primarily of seafood, fertilizer, agricultural commodities, lumber, petroleum products, and general merchandise. Also making use of the waterway from the time of its completion were yachts and various other pleasure craft.<sup>28</sup>

In the mid-1920s, just prior to construction of the Intracoastal Waterway, the Topsail Sound area was mapped in some detail by surveyor Eric Norden of New Hanover



**Aerial view of Topsail Inlet, May 1, 1938**

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

County. Norden's maps show that the width of New Topsail Inlet at this time was about 2,550 feet, approximately 500 feet narrower than it had been forty years earlier. The barrier beach between New Topsail and Old Topsail inlets was approximately 11,550 feet in length and was known locally as "Lea's Beach." Old Topsail Inlet was referred to as "Elmo Inlet." Banks Channel carried a depth of between eight and thirteen feet east-

ward along the back side of Topsail Beach, then a depth of from five to fourteen feet through the marshes northeastward to Sloop Point and the mouth of Virginia Creek.<sup>29</sup>

A Pender County highway map of 1938 indicates that no improvements of any kind existed in the vicinity of New Topsail Inlet or along Topsail Beach. Across the sound and the Intracoastal Waterway, however, a few structures were standing near the mouth of Old Topsail Creek. Other structures were located well to the northeast, in the vicinity of Sloop Point.<sup>30</sup> An aerial photograph of this same year clearly shows the spoil deposits created during the relatively recent construction of the Intracoastal Waterway, as well as Banks and Howard channels and the several other shallow and narrow channels which meandered northward through the marshes.<sup>31</sup>

By 1947 the development of Topsail Beach was about to begin in earnest. A bridge had been placed across the sound at the upper end of the beach, and a road had been constructed along the length of the beach nearly to the mouth of New Topsail Inlet. Some additional development had also taken place along the shore of Topsail Sound between Old Topsail and Virginia creeks.<sup>32</sup> A comparison of the 1947 map with one of 1970 reveals the extent to which development had occurred on Topsail Beach during the intervening years. A network of streets had been laid out and hundreds of cottages and other structures had been built. In addition, extensive docking facilities had been provided at the lower end of the beach, adjoining the mouth of New Topsail Inlet. Finally, besides the old Banks and Howard channels, a marked

channel was now provided for direct communication between the inlet and the Intracoastal Waterway.<sup>33</sup>

Between the mid-1920s and the mid-1970s, New Topsail Inlet narrowed rather dramatically, decreasing in width from about 2,550 feet to roughly 1,250 feet. The inlet's rather short gorge, which runs perpendicular to the beach, fluctuated in width between a minimum of 1,090 feet in the mid-1950s and a maximum of 2,043 feet in 1949. The breadth of the navigable channel within the gorge varied between 239 feet in the late 1950s and 611 feet in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the inlet has migrated perceptibly to the south during much of the twentieth century, reversing the northward migration which occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Between 1938 and 1972 the inlet moved some 2,680 feet to the south, with maximum movement occurring between 1948 and 1956.<sup>34</sup>

Topsail Beach and the shore of Topsail Sound have undergone extensive development in recent decades, and with that development has come an accelerated transformation of the vessel traffic through New Topsail Inlet from utilitarian to recreational. Once a significant artery of trade for sloops, schooners, and shallow draft steamers, the inlet is now used primarily by pleasure craft and by commercial and sport fishing boats. Historically subject to changing alignments and fluctuations in depth, it is maintained on a regular basis by the Corps of Engineers. ■

## NOTES

1. Mae Blake Graves, *Land Grants of New Hanover County* (Wilmington: Published by the author, 1980), 3.
2. Elizabeth F. McKoy, compiler and editor, *Early New Hanover County Records* (Wilmington: Published by the author, 1973), 102–106.
3. See Moseley Map (1733), North Carolina State Archives.
4. See Wimble Map (1738), North Carolina State Archives.
5. Margaret M. Hofmann, *Colony of North Carolina, 1735–1764: Abstracts of Land Patents* (Weldon: Roanoke News Co., 1982), 525–526.
6. Walter Clark, ed., *State Records of North Carolina*, 16 vols. (Winston and Goldsboro: State of North Carolina, 1895–1906), XXV, 313.
7. Clark, *State Records of North Carolina*, XXV, 379, and XXIII, 641 and 791.
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10. United States Congress, 44th Congress, 1st Session. Senate Executive Document, No. 35, p. 45.
11. Graves, *Land Grants of New Hanover County*, 105.
12. See Civil War map (1864), North Carolina State Archives.
13. See Civil War map (1864), North Carolina State Archives.
14. Richard Rush and others, eds., *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894–1914), Series I, vol. 8, p. 174. Hereinafter cited as Rush, War of Rebellion Naval Records.
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18. Rush, *War of Rebellion Naval Records*, Series I, vol. 8, pp. 468–469.
19. Rush, *War of Rebellion Naval Records*, Series I, vol. 8, p. 499.
20. Rush, *War of Rebellion Naval Records*, Series I, vol. 9, p. 177.
21. North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, Division of Mineral Resources, *An Oceanographic Atlas of the Carolina Continental Margin*. By J. G. Newton, O. H. Pilkey, and J. O. Blanton, 1971. [Prepared at Duke University Marine Laboratory at Beaufort, North Carolina, from research supported by the North Carolina Board of Science and Technology, the United States National Science Foundation, and the United States Geological Survey], wreck list and accompanying chart. The wreck list gives the location of this wreck only as "Topsail Inlet," but the chart locates the wreck site just north of New Topsail Inlet. This source hereinafter cited as N.C. Department of Conservation and Development, *An Oceanographic Atlas*.
22. N.C. Department of Conservation and Development, *An Oceanographic Atlas*, wreck list and accompanying chart; David Stick, *Graveyard of the Atlantic: Shipwrecks of the North Carolina Coast* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 249; and *Wilmington Star*, 13 September 1881.
23. United States Congress, 44th Congress, 1st Session. Senate Executive Document, No. 35, p. 15.
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25. See the Mouzon Map (1775), the Price-Strother Map (1880), the Mac Rae-Brazier Map (1833), the U.S. Coast Survey Map (1865), the Kerr-Cain Map (1882), and the Post Route Map (1896), North Carolina State Archives.
26. U.S. Coast Survey Map of Topsail Sound area (1885), North Carolina State Archives.
27. United States Congress, 69th Congress, 1st Session. House Document, No. 450, pp. 1–13.
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29. Eric Norden maps of Topsail Sound area, North Carolina State Archives.
30. Highway Map of Pender County (1938), North Carolina State Archives.
31. See 1938 aerial photograph, North Carolina State Archives.
32. See map of 1947, North Carolina State Archives.
33. See map of 1970, North Carolina State Archives.
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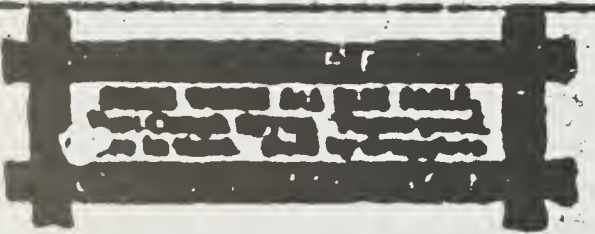
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# S. R. Fowle Company: Coastal Trade and Schooners

by Ann Merriman

*Program in Maritime History and Nautical Archæology, East Carolina University*

*This year the North Carolina Maritime History Council initiated a research paper competition for students in the Program in Maritime History and Nautical Archæology at East Carolina University. The competition is in keeping with the council's goals to promote research and writing in maritime history. This paper by Ann Merriman was the unanimous choice of the judges and it is the pleasure of the editors to present it here. Ann is a M.A. candidate and has a B.A. in Anthropology Specializing in Archæology from the University of Minnesota.*

**L**ong gone and replaced with mechanically powered vessels, merchant sailing schooners plied the coastal waters and estuaries of the eastern United States beginning in the eighteenth century and continued into the waning years of the 1800s. The refined simplicity of the schooner's fore-and-aft and topsail rig placed it in the forefront of nineteenth century commerce. A writer of the time ardently described the merchant schooner as:

The most elegant and, for small craft, the most manageable vessel that floats. Its proportions are more agreeable to the eye than those of any other species of craft, and its rig is in favour with owners of yachts—especially with those whose yachts are large. The schooner's distinctive peculiarities are, that it carries two masts, which usually “rake aft” or lean back a good deal; and its rig is chiefly fore-and-aft, like the sloop. Of the two masts, the after one is the *main-mast*. The other is termed the *fore-mast*. The sails of a schooner are the main-sail (the two last being square sails), on the fore-mast. In front of the fore-mast are the *stay-sail*, the *jib*, and the *flying-jib*; these last are triangular sails...Schooners sometimes carry a large square-sail, which is spread when the wind is “dead aft.” They are most used in the coasting trade; and one of their great advantages is that they can be worked with fewer “hands” than sloops of the same size.<sup>1</sup>

This poignant characterization coupled the schooner's practical aspects with its speed and agility under sail. These traits did not go unnoticed in North Carolina. The merchant schooner's versatility, adaptable sail configurations, shallow river and canal proficiency in its shallow draft form, ocean-going ability in its centerboard and keel configurations, and small crew requirements affirmed the schooner's place in nineteenth century North Carolina waterborne commerce.

North Carolina's sounds and inlets have provided protection and shelter for passenger and merchant vessels since the seventeenth century. Small locally built craft traveled eastern North Carolina's estuaries in the early colonial period, and by 1706 the Pamlico River accommodated shipwrights and shipbuilding. Settlers founded Washington, where the Tar River becomes the Pamlico River, in the 1770s. Known as “Little Washington” to avoid confusion after the founding of Washington, D.C., this location proved a viable lightering place and throughout the 1780s and 1790s Washington's (N.C.) port grew into an important commercial and export center with extensive wharves and warehouses. In 1790 the federal government declared the city an official port and opened a customs office there.<sup>2</sup> An integral part of Washington's commerce and industry into the late nineteenth century, coastal trading vessels supported the area's agrarian and commercial bases. In the early nineteenth century, schooners emerged as the most often used vessel for these trades.

Although it is commonly acknowledged that North Carolina merchants and mariners most often chose schooners for their maritime transportation, no statistical analysis to substantiate the claim has yet appeared. In this study, schooners owned or serviced by the S. R. Fowle Company (later becoming S. R. Fowle and Son Company) of Washington, North Carolina, are used as a model, based on the assumption that they characterized vessels used to transport goods to and from the major East Coast and West Indian markets in nineteenth century eastern North Carolina trade.

In 1818 Samuel Richardson Fowle joined his two older brothers, Josiah and James, in their general mercantile business located on the Pamlico River's Castle Island at Washington.<sup>3</sup> The Fowle brothers provided such commodities as tools, agricultural supplies, spool cotton, tobacco,

## Port of Washington.

### ENTERED.

11 Schr. Dependence, Fuller, Charleston  
 ,, Sloop Cashier, Halleck, N York

### CLEARED.

8 Schr. William & Mary, Gray, Wilming.

10 Schr. Milo, Humphrey, Philadelphia

11 Schr Edward & Mary, Burgess, Phila  
 delphia

**S. R. Fowle's first schooner, the *William and Mary*, left Little Washington for Wilmington with Captain Gray on 8 March 1819.**

*American Recorder*, 12 March 1819.

flour, sugar, salt, fish, coffee, molasses, and naval stores for Washington and the surrounding communities.<sup>4</sup> On 27 December 1818 S. R. Fowle purchased a partial interest in the 68.14 ton schooner *William and Mary*, the first vessel in S. R. Fowle's firm, and the 87.18 ton schooner *Henrietta* joined the *William and Mary* on 18 September 1821.<sup>5</sup> S. R. Fowle's commercial ventures involving merchant schooners persisted until at least 1898 when the 104 ton *Cora* still plied the West Indies trade.<sup>6</sup>

As a nineteenth century commissions merchant, S. R. Fowle received commodities from the upriver North Carolina counties of Nash, Edgecombe, and Pitt. A Washington resident remembered:

Some of my most vivid recollections have to do with the water traffic, both on the upper and lower rivers, and at sea. In fact, in the early days, water communication was the principal way of keeping in touch with the outside world...great quantities of products...were freighted down on flatboats consigned to middlemen here...to be shipped away on seagoing vessels. Those merchants found this business very lucrative, and were among the wealthiest and most prominent men of the town. Among them I recall Mr. B. F. Havens, Mr. W. A. Willard, Mr. S. R. Fowle, Mr. G. H. Brown, and Mr. John Myers. The flatboats brought a very important part of the trade of the town. These boats were propelled by manpower, they were poled along by negroes who walked along a plank footway along the side of the boat. As they walked, they chanted a most peculiar mournful

song. These flatboats came down the river piled high with bales of cotton, barrels of tar, pitch and turpentine, bags of corn, sides of bacon and stacks of brick, staves and shingles. The making of barrels was an important industry here, and the town was dotted with noisy cooper shops. These barrels were used by the large distilleries located here. The commission merchants, many of them, owned large sea-going vessels—two and three vessels each which traded along the coast northward to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston, and southward to the West Indies.<sup>7</sup>

Many S. R. Fowle and Son Company shipping documents survive, preserved and protected at East Carolina University.<sup>8</sup> One of two Fowle Company ledgers has 146 pages of hand-written shipping invoices spanning 1834–1850. Each invoice named a ship receiving cargo, the vessel's type, its master, the receiver of the freight and freight charges if any, the cargo on-loaded and lightered from other vessels, stowage and insurance considerations, and the invoice date.

Between November 1834 and October 1850 the Fowle Company ledger catalogued ninety-six different merchant vessels receiving cargo, numbering ninety-one schooners and five brigs. These ships logged 390 voyages, with schooners completing 381 of them. Mariners and merchants named in the ledger chose schooners for

## MARINE LIST.

### PORT OF WASHINGTON, N. C.

#### ARRIVED.

Aug. 26, Schr Pamplico, Simmons, Boston, ballast, to S R Fowle.

29, Schr B F Hanks, ———, NY, ballast, to G H Brown & Bro.

30, Sloop Henry Bateman, DeRighter, Richmond, ballast, to B F Brown.

Sept. 1, Schr Washington, Gaskill, NY, ballast, to G R Dixon.

#### CLEARED.

Aug 20, Schr Ella, Ellis, NY, naval stores, by J Myers & Son.

Schr Rio, Gautier, NY, naval stores, by J Tyler.

Schr Deborah, Robbins, NY, naval stores, by J Tyler.

31, Schr Independence, Farrow, NY, naval stores, by T & C Crawford.

Schr Star, Bond, Balt., lumber, by S R Fowle & Son.

**News of the schooner *Pamplico* arriving in Little Washington 26 August 1851.**

*North State Whig*, Wednesday 3 September 1851.

94.8% of this maritime transportation. Of these 381 voyages by schooner, 67.4% sailed to New York, 18.4% to Boston, 13.7% to the West Indies, and 0.5% to Baltimore. Brigs sailed to the West Indies most often, followed by Boston and New York.

The S. R. Fowle Company owned nine vessels listed in the ledger: seven schooners, one brig, and one brig converted from a schooner. In the 1840s Fowle sold the schooner *Pamplico* to its captain, Earles Ireland. The vessel continued to haul Fowle Company goods while in Ireland's possession and Fowle repurchased the *Pamplico* a few years later. The *Pamplico* accounted for 23% of the 1834-1850 voyages and led all other vessels in trips to New York, Boston, and the West Indies. Six captains commanded the *Pamplico* from its construction in 1837 until 1850.<sup>9</sup> Fowle's ledger names 102 different masters in its pages with many names appearing repeatedly, commanding several ships over the sixteen year period. Fowle's nine vessels alone had eighteen masters. These records clearly illustrate that masters moved from vessel to vessel frequently depending on necessity and economic conditions. Often a master working for the Fowle Company would accept the command of a newly built, larger vessel, thus increasing his commission or salary. These records dispel the popular belief that most sailing captains spent their lives with one favorite vessel.

The Fowle Company shipped freight for local merchants, Washington residents, and sold cargo to other merchants for shipment. Fowle also shipped his inventory ordered and purchased by Northeastern receiving companies. New York firms most often ordering goods from Fowle included Mitchell and Nielson (later to become Samuel L. Mitchell and Company), Bryan and Maitland, and the A. B. Allen Company. The Boston companies of Jeremiah Kitteridge, Charles Henshaw (later becoming Henshaw and Randall), and Ebenezer Stevens also appear often. Freight charges for turpentine, tar, and rosin ranged from thirty-five cents to fifty-five cents per barrel throughout the ledger with many fluctuations over the sixteen year period. The invoices differentiated between cargo stowed on or below deck, with notations whether the shipper or vessel pays for the difference in insurance.

The S. R. Fowle Company loaded ninety-three different cargo types onto sailing vessels between November 1834 and October 1850. The most numerous cargo categories were forestry products such as shingles, red oak hogshead staves, red oak staves, lumber, timber, and barrels of turpentine, tar, and rosin. The Fowle Company also transported many agricultural products, particularly bushels of corn and bales of cotton. The ledger's other major goods included flaxseed, wheat, peas, and beans, shipped in barrels, tierces, and bundles. Among the more intriguing items listed in the ledger were doubloons and francs in specie, goat, otter, and deer skins, boxes of boots and shoes, and bundles of hats.

The memoirs of William Henry von Eberstein of Washington, N.C., a self-proclaimed maritime adventurer, survive and provide a personal maritime history pertaining to Washington and merchant schooners. Mr. von Eberstein's memoirs contain recollections on his sailing days as navigator on schooners mentioned in the Fowle records:

I sailed out of Washington as master of navigation for several schooners from...about the 17th of July 1868. I sailed in the schooner *Washington*, belonging to Old Captain George Dixon. Joseph Gaskill Captained the schooner *Globe*, belonging to W. Potts. Captain Simmons, I do not remember his Christian name captained her also. Captain Jack Harris, and Captain Robert Monroe, which are both dead, were before on the Schooner *North Carolina*, belonging to Old W. John Lang, and Monroe Williams was Captain of her, experiencing a hurricane on our way from New York.<sup>10</sup>

In other passages Mr. von Eberstein mentioned the Fowle vessel *Edward Tillett* at the same dock as his vessel in

New York and tells of his warning Captain Gaskill to load more ballast due to the hurricane season. He also named Samuel R. Fowle when writing of yellow fever and a quarantine. Mr. von Eberstein on one occasion gave Samuel R. Fowle's son money for safekeeping.<sup>11</sup>

Standing alone, the S. R. Fowle and Son Company records provide vital information pertaining to nineteenth century schooners and their use. In a broader context, however, when compared to shipping documents com-

Shingles	1,799,090
Hogshead Staves	1,511,120
Staves	801,200
Barrels of Turpentine	150,692
Feet of Lumber	59,224
Bushels of Corn	50,871
Pieces of Timber	25,168
Barrels of Tar	22,364
Barrels of Rosin	7,807
Bales of Cotton	469

The most numerous commodities listed in the S. R. Fowle shipping ledger between 1834 and 1850.

Name	Years
Earles Ireland	1837-1839
John W. Toland	1839
Earles Ireland	1839-1840
Joseph T. Pugh	1840-1842
Rodney Fulford	1842-1847
J. Wm. Fulford	1847
Rodney Fulford	1847-1849
James Simmons	1849-1850

Schooner *Pamplico* masters from 1837-1850. *Pamplico* frequently changed masters, dispelling the popular belief that captains remained with one vessel until its demise.



in good order and well-conditioned, by **SAMUEL R. FOWLE**, on board  
 the Schooner called the *Greenville*  
 whereof *David R Brooks* is master, now lying in the port of  
**WASHINGTON, N. C.** and bound for *New York* To say:

H 359 Bbls Scraped  
 F 191 " Mix  
 550 Bbls J.C.K.W

350 Fire hundred fifty Bunch Turpentine  
 on 1/2 of Shipper

3 1/2 Bales Cotton  
 on 1/2 of J.M. Williams Esq.

being marked and numbered as in the margin, and are to be delivered in the like order and con-  
 dition, at the port of *New York* (the dangers of the seas only excepted)  
 unto *Messrs. Mitchell & Nelson* or to their assigns, he or they paying  
 freight for the said Cargo

Forty cent each for Bunch and half cent for  
 for the Cotton  
 with 1/2 primage, and average accustomed. In witness whereof, the master or purser of  
 the said vessel hath affirmed to three Bills of Lading, all of this tenor and date; one of which  
 being accomplished, the others to stand void.

Dated in **WASHINGTON, N. C.** the *4th* day of *December* 1835  
*David R Brooks*

359 Bbls Scraped 187.646.20  
 191 " Mix 326.620.75  
 550 1266.95

**A typical page from the S. R. Fowle & Son Company shipping ledger. This invoice differentiates between grades of turpentine. Fowle owned the schooner Greenville.**

Collection No. 460, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University.

piled by the United States government, the surviving Fowle ledgers reflect greater North Carolina shipping activity in the nineteenth century and herein lies their significance. The company records reflect the overall trade of eastern North Carolina in the nineteenth century.

Federal vessel enrollment and registration abstract lists survive for most of the nineteenth century. These books chronicle vessels receiving certificates of enrollment for the coasting trade or certificates of registration for overseas commerce. The documents record the ship's type, deadweight tonnage, owner, master, description of former papers, any vessel alterations such as lengthening or change of rig, its disposition, and the transaction's date.

Four years of enrollments and registrations, spanning 1834-1837, were studied to obtain a small sample for comparison to the Fowle ledger, including data from every North Carolina port except Wilmington. Although the busiest port in North Carolina, Wilmington's scant enrollment records, exceed-

ingly large number of registered vessels, and extensive international maritime commerce, lessened its comparative value with records of other ports. The ports of Washington, Beaufort, New Bern, Plymouth, Edenton, Ocracoke, and Elizabeth City, on the other hand, are relatively the same size, making good units for comparative analysis.

Forty-seven schooners engaged in the coasting trade enrolled in Washington from 1834 to 1837 equaling 3300 deadweight tons.<sup>12</sup> Fifty-four schooners totaling 5440 deadweight tons registered there.<sup>13</sup> In all, out of the 322 schooners enrolled during this four-year period in the North Carolina ports that were examined, 14.6% of them worked out of Washington, accounting for 17.5% of the state's deadweight tonnage. During this period 245 schooners registered in these

ports with Washington accounting for 22.0% of them and 25.8% of the deadweight tonnage.

Eight different vessel types (schooners, brigs, sloops, brigantines, barques, boats, steamboats, and ships)

Type	Name	Tons	Voyages
Brig	<i>Adeline</i>	177.30	3
Schooner	<i>Edward Tillett</i>	170.61	2
Brig	<i>Edward Tillett</i>	170.66	4
Schooner	<i>Greenville</i>	137.03	27
Schooner	<i>James G. Stacy</i>	74.74	25
Schooner	<i>Marion</i>	59.47	27
Schooner	<i>Martha M. Fowle</i>	67.91	41
Schooner	<i>Melville</i>	112.05	39
Schooner	<i>Pamplico</i>	104.05	90
<b>Total</b>			<b>258</b>

These S. R. Fowle-owned vessels account for 66.2% of the total voyages in the S. R. Fowle shipping ledger between 1834 and 1850.

enrolled or registered in the North Carolina ports studied between 1834–1837.<sup>14</sup> The total of all vessel types equaled 635 with a deadweight tonnage of 47,132. Of the 635 vessels enrolled or registered, schooners accounted for 567 and 39,890 deadweight tons. Schooners accounted for 89.3% of the total vessels documented between 1834 and 1837 and 84.6% of the total deadweight tonnage. The addition of data from Wilmington into these statistics would increase the totals, particularly for registered schooners. A perusal of the registration abstracts clearly indicates that schooners were the predominant vessel working from these ports.

These statistical results do not thoroughly depict the schooner's role in nineteenth century North Carolina trade or even Washington's trade. On the contrary, these figures raise questions rather than provide answers. A small sample of this vessel type exists in the archaeological record and an even smaller number of sites have undergone thorough documentation. This large discrepancy for a vessel type that facilitated and shaped North Carolina's commerce throughout the nineteenth century requires alleviation through extensive archaeological investigation and historical documentation.

This preliminary research provides building blocks for continued investigation of schooner use in nineteenth century North Carolina and its relation to the S. R. Fowle and Son Company of Washington. The outcome of future work will hopefully do justice to the abilities, virtues, and grace of the coastal trading schooner. ■

## NOTES

1. David R. MacGregor, *Schooners in Four Centuries* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 10–11, citing R. M. Ballantyne, *Man on the Ocean*, 1874.
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4. *Washington Gazette* (Washington, N.C.), 28 February 1884.
5. U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Certificates of Enrollment issued at North Carolina Ports, 1815–1911, Abstracts, Record Group 41, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 27 December 1818, 18 September 1821. Hereinafter cited as Enrollment Abstracts.
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7. Lucy Wheelock Warren Myers, "Bygone Days," in *Washington and the Pamlico*, Loy and Worthy, 35.

8. S. R. Fowle and Son Company Collection, Special Collections, University Manuscripts, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

9. U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Enrollment Abstracts, 1837; and S. R. Fowle and Son Company Collection, ledger, 1837–1850, passim.

10. William Henry von Eberstein, "Memoirs," William Henry von Eberstein Papers, Special Collections, University Manuscripts, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C., 93.

11. *Ibid.*, 96, 117.

12. U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Enrollment Abstracts, 1834, 1835, 1836, 1837.

13. U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Certificates of Registration issued at North Carolina Ports, 1815–1911, Abstracts, Record Group 41, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 1834, 1835, 1836, 1837. Hereinafter cited as Registration Abstracts.

14. U.S. Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Enrollment Abstracts and Registration Abstracts, 1834, 1835, 1836, 1837.



# A View of History: Learning from the Past

*Commentary by Michael Alford*

Photographs from days gone by have the ability to evoke powerful feelings. They may inspire reminiscence by reminding us of something from our past, or they may simply be romantic in their appeal. For more than two decades I have sifted through old photographs of coastal North Carolina. Any photograph in which a boat appears catches my attention. I look for answers to questions that only a period photograph (or a time machine!) might provide. Help with elusive answers, though, is only part of their usefulness. Photographs have raised questions I never thought to ask so they are very useful aids to research.

In this photographic presentation, we hope to show you, in a small way, how images from the past have helped in tracing the origins and development of North Carolina's working watercraft. Included are photos that led us to important conclusions as well as some that raised questions as yet unanswered.

1. At first this view of the Beaufort waterfront, seen from

the east, would seem to be only a peaceful scene of drying nets and sharpies at anchor. To be sure, the array of rig types displayed on the sharpies is quite interesting, though not new. They've all been seen on other surviving photographs. This is the 1890s—turn of century. Of particular interest is the overturned boat in the center. The practiced eye concludes that it is a logboat, a craft hollowed out of a log, but other elements gave cause to question. For instance, there appears to be a rabbet line along the keel, stem, and sternpost. This would indicate a planked up boat rather than one dug from a log.

Only recently was enough field research available to make identification certain. It is indeed a log boat, but a special type in which the two sides are made from a log and split apart, or made from two separate logs, and then joined to a "keel" down the middle. This results in a demarcation line where the centerline pieces and the two sides meet—a virtual rabbet line!

This technique was described by John Lawson as early as 1700. Two intact boats, a few fragments, and a handful of photographs are all that remain of a once common boat type.



**2.** This photo, also from the 1890s, presents an interesting question by virtue of its identity. From the rig and the boat's proportions, we know this to be a pound net boat of a type used on the Great Lakes late in the nineteenth century. It was a flatbottom boat with an unusual sailing rig. This and a companion photograph were found among others made by H. H. Brimley. The other image shows the shore, which is plainly coastal North Carolina.

The question the photograph raises is, what was this boat doing here? Does it represent an attempt to introduce a new type, as in the case of the sharpie some twenty years earlier? Our best theory is that it is connected with increased popularity of the pound net in North Carolina. Apparently it did not work out, however, because none of the characteristics of the hull or the sailing rig show up in subsequent local boatbuilding developments. The round-bottom shadboat and its variants became the boat of choice for the pound net fishery.

**3.** Exactly how was a shadboat built? The best verbal description is always enhanced by visual evidence like this. We already had a description for a shadboat when this photograph and a couple of others were discovered. Fortunately, the verbal and visual evidence were for the same builder. Together they make a highly reliable





source of building knowledge for this unique and very significant boat type.

In this photo we see ribbands applied over five mold stations. Without the verbal description we might have concluded that the photo represents conventional carvel construction. Actually, the unusual shadboat technique is an interesting hybrid of carvel and inserted-frame construction.

**4.** Here we have another question. In the foreground is an interesting little boat derived from the sharpie type. Next to the shed in the background there is a two-masted boat for which we have no other evidence, photographic or otherwise.

In certain ways the hull is similar to our shadboats, but there is no evidence to support the notion that any carried two masts. It has been compared to a couple of types from New England, but the similarity is slight. The location is Edenton and the date is late nineteenth century. And the boat remains a puzzle.

**5.** This is Roanoke Island in the late 1800s. Most of the boats with masts are shadboats, including the one in center foreground. Two of the shadboats in the background look at first as if they are lateen rigged. This and one other photograph are the only images to show this phenomenon. Of course they are not rigged with lateens. The long spar crossing the mast is the topmast.

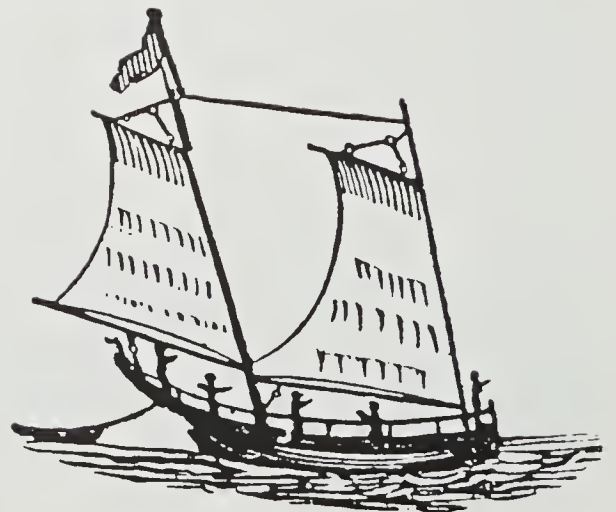
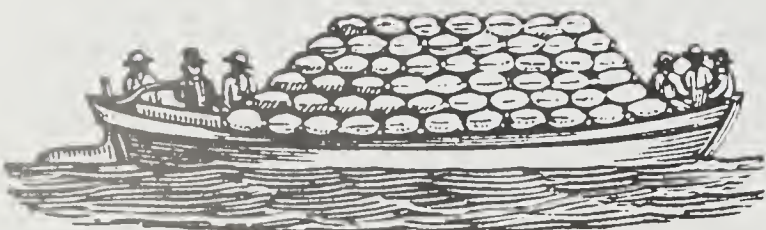
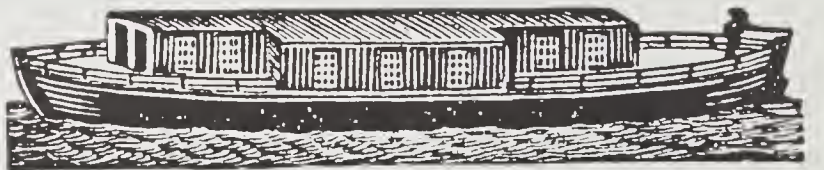
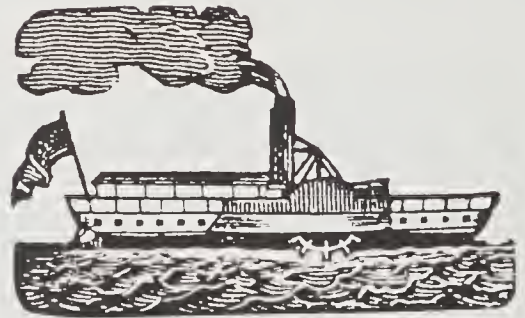
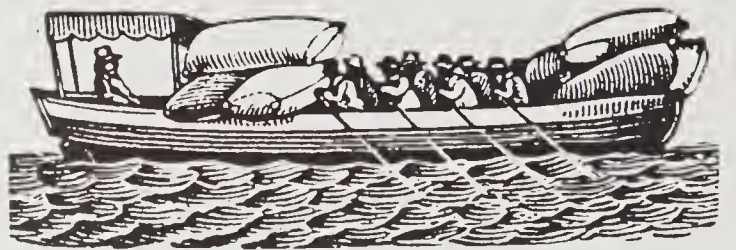
The North Carolina style of the spritsail rig is completely unique in the manner of rigging the topsail. These photos provided further evidence of how this unusual rig was managed.



The topmast is very long and is carried aloft by a halyard, rather than being stepped, the more usual case. It is set independently of the mainsail and can be dipped, as shown, for mooring convenience, unshipped and stored in the boat like the one in the foreground, or flung overboard in a squall and dragged by the halyard as a sea anchor.

Again, historical photographs in combination with oral histories provide additional information and can offer corroborative evidence.





# North Carolina Register of Historic Vessels

The North Carolina Maritime Museum and the North Carolina Maritime History Council have jointly initiated a state registration program for historical boats and ships. Similar to the national program that recognizes historically significant ships, this program focuses on significance at the state level.

Applications are distributed through the museum, which also administers the program. Vessels that qualify will undergo a process to document their history and current status. Documentation could include vessel surveys, photography, document searches, oral histories, and other background work.

To be considered historically significant, a vessel must:

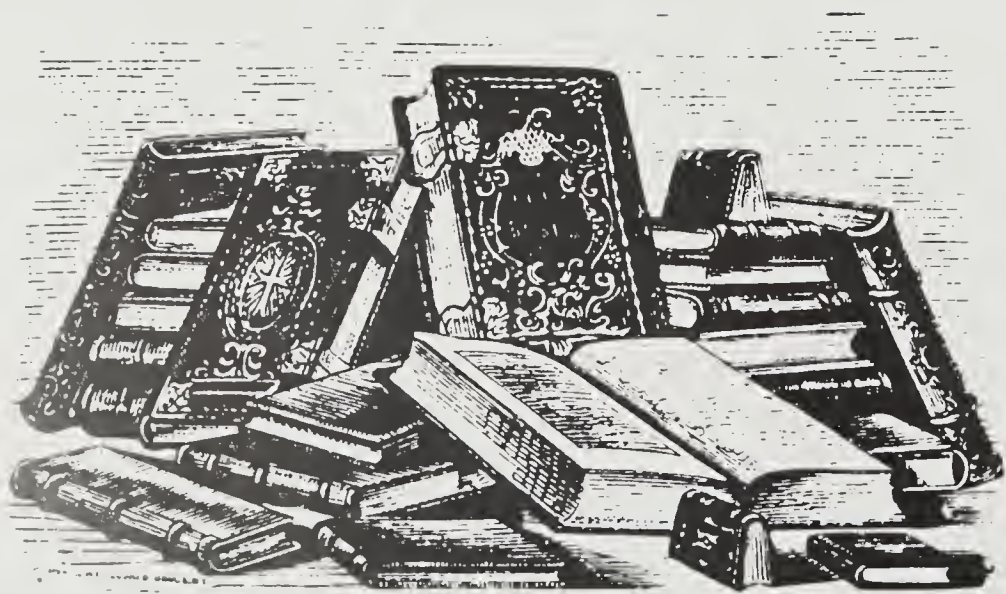
- be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of North Carolina; or
- be associated with the lives of persons significant in North Carolina's past; or
- embody characteristics that:
  - are distinctive of a type, period, or method of construction in North Carolina; or
  - represent the work of a North Carolina master; or
  - possess high artistic value attributable to North Carolina artisans or traditional practices; or
  - represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction but have significant North Carolina associations; or
- have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in North Carolina's prehistory or history.

These criteria also recognize several special cases. For instance, vessels built in North Carolina for owners and/or service outside the state can qualify in certain conditions. Likewise, vessels with origins outside North Carolina may be eligible if they meet at least one of the above criteria.

Historical replicas and reconstructions may be eligible for listing on the North Carolina Register. They will be evaluated on the basis of what they are intended to represent, using the eligibility standards for historic vessels, and on the research upon which the reconstruction was based.

The above criteria are adapted from the Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Historic Vessel Preservation Projects" (May 1990). In their original form they are meant to apply to vessels of national historical significance and are treated in more detail in National Register Bulletin #20, "Nominating Historic Vessels and Shipwrecks to the National Register of Historic Places." The wording of the criteria for historical significance has been modified to restrict the criteria to vessels associated with North Carolina. ■

*For more information, or to make application for a vessel, contact the North Carolina Maritime Museum, 315 Front Street, Beaufort, N.C. 28516, or call 919-728-7317.*



# Books and Reviews

Alan D. Watson. *Onslow County: A Brief History*. Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. 184 pages (\$8.00 paperback, plus \$2.00 postage).

*Reviewed by Michael Alford*

**A**rchives and History's series of county histories, of which this is the fourteenth, constitutes one of the rare bargains we are fortunate enough to encounter in our pursuit of knowledge. Ounce for ounce and dollar for dollar, a better deal would be hard to find. Dr. Watson's newest contribution is no exception. It is literally crammed with historical facts, and the bibliography alone would be a valuable resource.

Beginning with a quick glance at the pre-settlement period, the author gets right down to the business of chronicling the events and people that shaped this interesting coastal county. Despite the subtitle, there is plenty of substance here. There are all the statistics and important dates that we expect—and more—but we also get glimpses of the humanity, and the kind of anecdotes that bring history to life. Watson likes history and it shows in his writing. Only in the final chapter, in which the entire twentieth century is shoehorned, do we feel the author's pressure to "get it all in." But for most of us, the "youngest" is the least interesting anyway.

I suspect that a reader seriously interested in Onslow County will spend much time with the end notes. There are plenty of them and they attest to the care and diligence applied in the preparation of this book. They invite further reading.

The maritime aspects of a coastal county history may appear to be obvious, especially to readers of this publication, but Dr. Watson has a sensitivity to the subject that brings the association closer, makes it more vivid. The final paragraph of his book is like a maritime anthem. When we ponder the meaning of "maritime" we should have this tidbit close at hand. "Water originally provided access to Onslow, and thereafter influenced all facets of life. Streams and rivers flowing to the sounds and ulti-

mately the ocean constituted avenues of social interaction and economic development. Naval stores, wood products, and farm produce found their way to markets via water, at least before the advent of the railroad and a modern highway system....Ultimately, Onslow arose in a maritime setting and retained a close association with, if not a dependence upon, water resources."

These paperbacks issued by Archives and History are handy, readable, and sound history sources, and by today's standards, very reasonably priced. We can all hope they will continue to add titles to this important series, and that the maritime counties will be treated with the same sensitivity that Alan Watson gives Onslow. ■

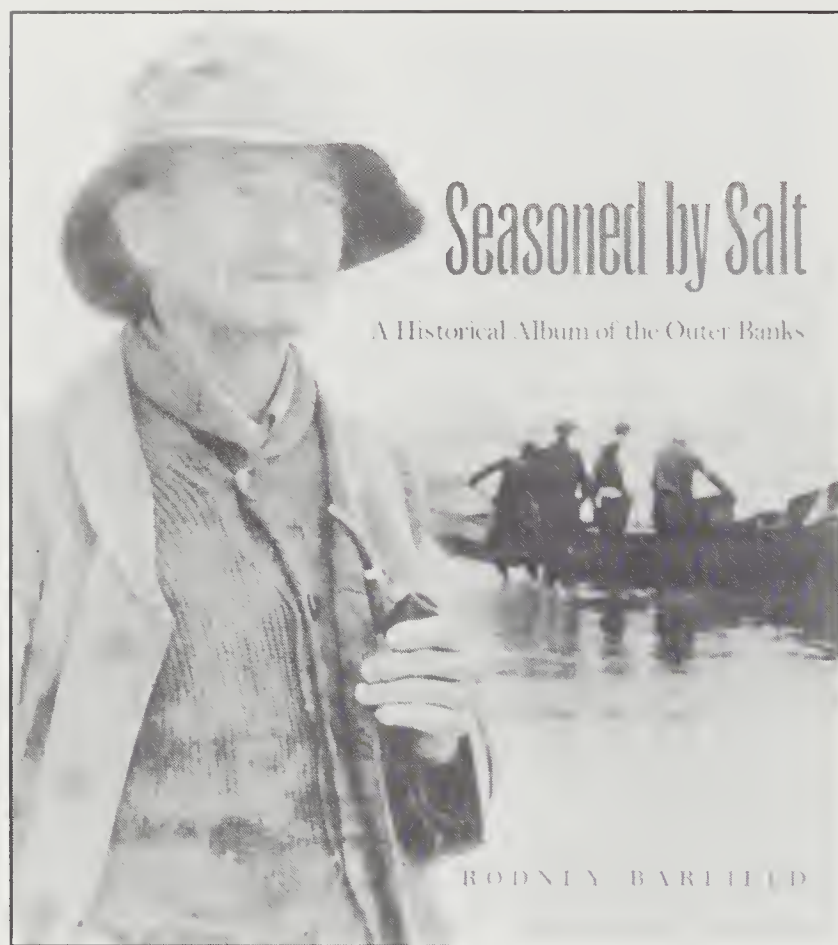
Rodney Barfield. *Seasoned by Salt: A Historical Album of the Outer Banks*. The University of North Carolina Press (\$18.95 paperback, \$34.95 hardcover).

*Reviewed by Joel G. Hancock*

**I**n Rodney Barfield's new book, the story of North Carolina's Outer Banks is told twice. First, the author uses a series of essays that explore the broad sweep of Banks culture, from subsistence fishing to the building of windmills. Then, more poignantly, he presents a montage of period photos that leave readers feeling they have experienced a time warp, vicariously sharing the life of a Banker amid the sand, sea, and salt.

The lives and culture of the Bankers have been a popular subject for writers on and off the Banks for more than a generation. Yet Barfield's work is of special significance in that this collection of photographs and illustrations can be a companion to almost any previous study. For that reason alone, it will be a necessary addition to any library or collection concerning this topic.

Barfield's stories and pictures give light not only to the famous, but to the forgotten as well. Pictures of the Wright Brothers and drawings of President Cleveland are given no more attention than those of former slaves who



settled on Roanoke Island, and oyster canners on a packing line in Beaufort. These images speak volumes about their subjects. In the wrinkled faces, gnarled trees, and sun-bleached houses, one can sense how the Bankers, hard as they tried, succeeded only in fighting the elements to a stand-off. They gave their best in the constant effort to capture and harvest the bounty of the sea, but all the while they lived with an understanding that, at any moment, the wind and water could rise up and reclaim everything the Bankers had.

There is much that yet may be gleaned from the tacit accord existing between the Bankers and their environment. Removable floorboards in frame homes might no longer be practical, but an unwillingness to encroach on the sea by building too close to the shore is still wise. "Most of the houses and other structures were built on the sound side of the island," Barfield writes, "It would have been considered the height of foolishness to build on the ocean side,...[for] the islanders depended on high dunes and vegetation as a break and buffer from ocean storms."

One aspect of Banks life that is evident throughout the book is the community nature of living and working by the sea. From pulling on purse seines, to building sharpies, the industry of the sea demanded a group effort. On the Banks, these groups took shape not as the result of contracts or negotiation, but because families and friends shared lives just as assuredly as they shared addresses. This, perhaps, is best illustrated in Barfield's account of how the shore-based whalers of Diamond City worked together to find, capture, and finally, harvest the bounty of the giant mammals that frequented their waters each Spring.

Among other areas addressed by the author is a discussion of how Union soldiers stationed on the Banks during the Civil War later returned and helped to commercialize what earlier had been only a private fishing industry. He suggests how the availability of jobs and wages helped to change the lives as well as the economies of the Banks communities. Similarly, he traces the genealogies of boat types that many Islanders consider to have been indigenous. His illustrations record how those styles have developed into what remains one of their most stringent ties with the past.

To the Bankers salt was a preservative as much as it was a seasoning. And not only did it keep spot and herring from spoiling, but the wind driven salt, and the hardships it caused, served to separate them from the people and problems that lay west of the sounds. Just as salt now has given way to freezer bags, so too has the shield of isolation been overwhelmed by ferries and beach homes. After more than two and a half centuries, a lifestyle that flowed seamlessly from one generation to the next, might now be lost forever.

Thus, perusing the pictures and pages of *Seasoned by Salt* is not without its wistful moments. A two-page spread showing an older lady stirring a large boiler pot with a stick is accompanied by this caption, "Independent and resilient, Bankers have made do with the natural resources of the island for centuries. This elderly woman on Hatteras Island lived life much as her ancestors did and her children would." It is because photographs made today could not share a similar caption that Barfield's work is so vitally important. ■

Dirk Frankenberg. *The Nature of the Outer Banks*. The University of North Carolina Press. 180 pages (\$14.95 paperback).

*Reviewed by Patricia Hay*

**T**he Outer Banks from Corolla to Ocracoke are the basis for a refreshing book by Dirk Frankenberg, a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill marine science professor and former director of the Marine Sciences program. He begins with a presentation of the physical processes of nature that shape these barrier islands and describes the unique vegetation and habitats found there in very readable language. Frankenberg next supplies a step-by-step guide to specific sites where these processes and habitats can be observed. He follows with an insightful

analysis of the issues that will impact future development along the Outer Banks with an eye to the history of man's activities on these barrier islands.

The author discusses inlet formation, how giant dunes are created, why waves can both build or erode beaches, and why barrier island vegetation takes the shape it does. He also recounts how these actions of nature have impacted coastal development, from the placement of homes on the back side of the islands to the dangers and frustrations of coastal navigation around capes and through baffling inlets.

Frankenberg's book will be well received by teachers, naturalists, and scientists. The author describes the three major environmental processes shaping the structure and appearance of the Banks: rising sea level, transport of sand by wind and water, and the immobilization of sand by plant growth. An abundance of insightful illustrations and a few well-chosen photographs provide excellent support for the text. For those that want more information about specific aspects, Frankenberg offers an excellent reference list.

The second chapter saves all of us from the time-consuming task of scouting out accessible locations in which to view the subtle and powerful examples of the work of wind and water. These are very detailed directions that inform us what turns to make, where to park, and which path to follow for how long. Frankenberg's descriptions of what will be seen at the end of the path function as a carrot-on-a-string.

There is much to interest the nonscientist as well. The author's fine sense of humor adds a much appreciated dimension to his book. He describes how Postmaster William Tate functioned as a "nineteenth century Chamber of Commerce" in response to a letter from "one Wilbur Wright" providing information about "local winds and whether open ground suitable for experiments with a flying machine was available." Tate then "provided explicit directions on how to reach Kitty Hawk, gave advice concerning the times of year most suitable for kite flying, and offered to help Wilbur and his brother Orville achieve success in their efforts to build a flying machine." The author writes, "Never has a dose of southern hospitality had a more revolutionary impact on the world than did William Tate's 1900 letter to the Wright brothers."

The modern-day appreciation of a good beach day is put into perspective in a description of the area surrounding the Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station. The author describes the Civil War battle, Chicamacomico Races, as follows, "Reports of the 'hot sand and bright sun' suggest that it was probably good beach weather. Be that as it may, a forced 25-mile march through loose sand, while someone shoots at you from the rear and others try to land between you and safety, is enough to ruin anyone's enthusiasm for beaches, no matter how pleasant the weather."

Frankenberg also provides insight into resource devel-

opment from the Civil War to the present with a focus on how "infrastructure projects fundamentally changed the nature of the Banks and the density of human populations that could live there." With an eye to the past and a discussion of fisheries as "an example of resource development constrained by finite resources," he presents the issues that limit future growth on the Banks - water supply and wastewater disposal.

This book could find a place on the bookshelf of anyone that lives or owns property on the Outer Banks. It will be equally valuable for the tourist, educator, historian, environmentalist, developer, or policy maker. ■





# Reports from the Field

## Program in Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology

East Carolina University, Greenville

During the late spring and summer of 1995, East Carolina University was engaged in a number of maritime research projects. Projects spanned the historic spectrum from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries and involved surveys and extensive excavation of vessels.

The Cypress Landing Vessel in Chocowinity Bay was excavated as part of East Carolina University's summer field school. The vessel was originally thought to be a centerboard schooner but investigation proved it to be a two-masted, centerboard sailing scow. It probably dates to the second half of the nineteenth century as a transport on the Pamlico River.

Under the direction of Larry Babits and Ann Merriman, the port side was excavated and recorded. This shallow draft boat had several curious features including a keelson that did not run the entire length of the vessel. Damage to the aft mast partner was only partially repaired, and tongue and groove ceiling remained in the cargo area. Few artifacts were found during excavation, which made precise dating difficult.

After completing work on the Cypress Landing Vessel, East Carolina students moved about ten miles to the remains of a Civil War era, John Porter gunboat. This wooden gunboat was probably built in Washington, North Carolina in 1862. When Union forces took over Pamlico Sound, the unfinished boat was moved into a small creek near Grimesland. It was apparently burned there when the Confederates realized that it could not be finished nor moved.

The field school examined the hull under the direction of Larry Babits and Edwin Combs. By the end of the field school, about sixty percent of the vessel's port side had been recorded. Recording concentrated on the bow, stern, engine bedlogs, and deck attachments. These features are poorly understood because only one Porter gunboat, CSS *Chattahoochee*, has previously been examined.

During the spring and summer, survey work on the Pungo River and its tributary streams continued under the direction of Larry Babits and Annalies C. Kjorness of East Carolina University. This survey was funded by a survey

and planning grant from the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. During the survey nearly fifty previously unreported boats were noted and recorded. This information will be used to establish a more accurate evaluation of significance for abandoned work boats in North Carolina waters. While most of the boats dated to the twentieth century, a number of earlier craft, including at least three centerboard schooners were identified.

As part of a cooperative effort involving East Carolina University and the NC Department of Cultural Resources Underwater Archaeology Unit, an inspection of Shell Castle Island was made in April. This survey was under the direction of Gordon P. Watts and Phil McGuinn, of ECU. The project recovered many construction details including building foundations and assorted artifacts.

During July and August, Gordon P. Watts and several graduate students continued surveying the Civil War wrecks off Fort Fisher with funding from the National Park Service. At least one additional wreck was noted and another clarified. It seems that what was once thought to be the USS *Louisiana* may in fact, be the remains of a commercial vessel called the *Firefly*. Research is continuing to verify the identification. ■

*For more information contact Dr. Larry Babits, East Carolina University*

## North Carolina Maritime Museum

Beaufort

### TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OBSERVANCE

The museum is celebrating its twentieth year as the state's maritime museum. Although its collections and history can be traced to considerably earlier origins, 1975 is generally accepted for the beginnings of the present organization.

In a public ceremony at the museum on September 17, 500 people enjoyed an open house, refreshments, and a special presentation by the Second Marine Aircraft Wing Band. Rodney Barfield, Director; Friends of the Museum President, Grayden Paul; first Chairman of the original advisory board, John Costlow; and special guest James

A. Graham, Commissioner of Agriculture made appropriate remarks in a program on the museum patio.

A number of state and local dignitaries were in attendance. Commissioner Graham and former director Charles McNeill were presented with gifts to mark the occasion. The staff was on hand to take guests through the exhibit and collections storage areas. ■

#### CAROLINA MARITIME MODEL SOCIETY

**M**ore than twenty-five shipmodeling enthusiasts gathered at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in January to establish the state's only shipmodeler's guild. As of August membership stood at more than fifty. Sponsorship of such a group had long been a goal of the museum, whose broad objectives include fostering skills and developing resources for quality shipmodeling, and model repair and restoration.

The society serves to encourage interest and active participation in the hobby by bringing together both neophyte and advanced modelers in an atmosphere of enjoyment and mutual respect. The free exchange of information, ideas, and techniques results in improvements in the standards of members' models.

Another benefit of the organization is that members and the public see that research is the foundation for the production of high-quality ship models. This is a benefit to the museum and ample justification for sponsoring the society. The group meets at the museum, participates in museum sponsored events, and is provided with exhibit space and publicity for a "Model of the Month."

Members have taken the initiative to further the society's ends. They mounted a substantial model ship exhibition in conjunction with the museum's Wooden Boat Show in May. In July they started a newsletter and have used surveys to create a database of member's interests and skills. Another goal is to generate a computer-based catalog of research materials held by its membership, including books, periodicals, plans, and archival data. Both the museum and the membership would benefit from this database.

The Carolina Maritime Model Society has already drawn new enthusiasts into shipmodeling. Its strong beginnings and high level of activity are signs that it should become a major vehicle for widening public interest in North Carolina's maritime history and culture. ■

*For more information contact Paul Fontenoy or Jane Wolff, North Carolina Maritime Museum, Beaufort*

#### Underwater Archaeology Unit

Kure Beach

**I**n 1967 a state statute (NCGS 121 Article 3) asserted the state's title to "all bottoms of navigable waters within one marine league [three nautical miles] seaward from the Atlantic seashore." It claimed ownership for the state of "all shipwrecks, vessels, cargoes, tackle, and underwater archaeological artifacts that have remained unclaimed for more than 10 years lying on said bottoms, or on the bottoms of any other navigable waters of the State." The statute also authorized the Department of Cultural Resources to establish a professional staff and formulate rules and regulations to manage these submerged resources, and develop a permitting system to allow other individuals, groups, and institutions to conduct investigations and recovery projects of the state's underwater archaeological sites. The Underwater Archaeology Unit was established to respond to those requirements.

Passage of the federal Abandoned Shipwreck Act strengthened that statute in 1987. These laws mandate responsibility for an enormous expanse of submerged bottom lands and the shipwrecks and other archaeological sites they contain. If the offshore ocean waters out to the three-mile limit are combined with the interior sounds and rivers, the Department of Cultural Resources is responsible for managing cultural resources on 4,374 square miles of bottom land, an area only slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut.

For thirty years the Underwater Archaeology Unit of the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section has made steady progress in its efforts to understand and manage the state's submerged cultural resources. Over seven hundred underwater archaeological sites, including prehistoric dugout canoes, colonial sailing vessels, beached shipwreck remains, dozens of Civil War shipwrecks, and nineteenth and twentieth century steamboats, have been documented. The Unit also maintains extensive files on nearly four thousand historical shipwrecks, and a variety of water-related subjects such as bridge and ferry crossings, historic ports, plantation landings, river and coastal trade, harbor development, and improvements to navigation.

The following summary of the UAU's activities over the past year gives a good picture of how the Unit, often working with other agencies and institutions, manages the state's submerged cultural resources through a program of public education, site development, and field research.

## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

The underwater archaeology educational outreach program, *Hidden Beneath the Waves*, developed by the UAU and Cape Fear Museum, highlights the unit's educational outreach efforts. Two outreach kits, each featuring a model of a different shipwreck, are now available to area middle school teachers for a four-week period. This year it is estimated that over three hundred students in the Wilmington area will participate in this exciting, hands-on classroom experience.

Targeted for 8th-grade students, each self-contained outreach kit provides video presentations, historical research exercises, quiz games, and the mystery wreck model to be identified by students. Solving the mystery wreck is the highlight of the four-unit program; it involves working with historical maps, artifacts, and a four-foot model of an actual shipwreck currently lying at the bottom of the Cape Fear River. ■

## SHIPWRECK PRESERVES

Since the creation of North Carolina's first Historic Shipwreck Preserve in 1992, the USS *Huron* site, UAU staff members have searched for other potential sites. Unfortunately, the *Huron* shipwreck is relatively unique because it provides an accessible beach dive with good visibility in a populated area. Moreover, the vessel has an interesting history; its remains are well-preserved, and recognizable features such as boilers, propeller, and rudder can be seen.

On the other hand the vast majority of recreational dive sites lie outside North Carolina's three-mile limit and UAU's jurisdiction. While there are many sunken vessels within state waters, they are mostly in areas of low visibility and strong currents where safety is a serious concern. A few others that might serve as shipwreck preserves are located in unpopulated areas, such as the vacant stretches of the Outer Banks far from dive shops and community support. There would be no local sources for funding or surveillance, essential elements of prospective preserves.

To overcome the shortcoming of preserve sites, the UAU is exploring a new avenue for public education and community involvement—the Shipwreck Overlook. Overlooks would feature octagonal wooden gazebos placed along the shoreline adjacent to shipwreck sites. Within the gazebo, display panels would present photographs and informative text concerning the ship's history and the circumstances surrounding its sinking. As with the preserve concept, the UAU would provide the historical information and gazebo plans, while the local community would pay for materials and be responsible for main-

tenance. The actual construction would be a joint effort.

The first North Carolina Shipwreck Overlook was built this fall by the Town of Carolina Beach, Federal Point Historic Preservation Society, and UAU. It is located on the shore below Wilmington near the site of the Civil War blockade runner *General Beauregard*. On the night of December 11, 1863, the Union fleet chased the sidewheel steamer ashore one mile south of Gatlin's Battery near what is today Carolina Beach. The *General Beauregard* was headed for Wilmington with a cargo of brown sugar, coffee, bacon, and candles when it sank. Although seldom visited by sport divers, the remains of the paddlewheel hubs, exposed at low tide, are a curiosity to thousands of tourists that visit the beach annually. UAU staff members are excited about the Shipwreck Overlooks because they can serve as an effective and inexpensive way to promote community awareness and pride in local maritime history and submerged archaeological resources. ■

## RESEARCH

The UAU staff has also recently been involved in a variety of research activities, the majority of which were cooperative ventures with staff and graduate students from East Carolina University's Program in Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology.

A week-long expedition was launched in May to study the nearly inundated island known as Shell Castle, near Ocracoke. Located inside the inlet next to the deep water channel, this small isle, complete with wharfs, warehouses, houses, and a lighthouse, served as a vital transshipment point from 1790 until the early 1800s. It was reportedly one of the most valuable pieces of property in the country at that time. East Carolina University graduate student Phil McGuinn is combining field data with extensive historical research to reconstruct life on Shell Castle for his master's thesis.

In June, a field school under the direction of Dr. Larry Babits (ECU) was conducted at the shipwreck site of a centerboard schooner in Chocowinity Bay near Washington, North Carolina. That site was discovered during the construction of a large marina. Unit staff negotiated with the developer, Weyerhaeuser Real Estate Company, to alter marina plans and protect the site until a thorough examination and assessment could be conducted. During the ECU field school the shipwreck was identified as a previously undocumented ship type exhibiting a square transom and bow. This scow-like sailing vessel was most likely built in the Albemarle region shortly after the Civil War to transport bulk cargoes, such as bricks, in the local sounds and rivers.

Ann Merriman, an ECU graduate student, was field

supervisor for the Chocowinity Bay shipwreck study and also served as an intern with the UAU at Fort Fisher. Her primary task was to reorganize the UAU research files, which consist of records on historic shipwrecks, archaeological sites, historic water-related activities, artifact analysis, and maritime subjects. Ann also revised and updated the UAU bibliography for underwater archaeological site and survey reports in North Carolina.

Another ECU graduate student, Nathan Henry, interned at Fort Fisher this summer. His primary responsibilities were in the conservation lab where he prepared the large collection of USS *Underwriter* artifacts for transfer to the CSS *Neuse* State Historic Site, and painstakingly preserved a late nineteenth-century galley stove. However, as often happens at Fort Fisher, more urgent needs arose and Nathan was pressed into salvaging a thirty-by-fifty-foot shed that will be used as an artifact conservation and storage area. His help was also needed in the construction of the *Beauregard* Shipwreck Overlook Gazebo at Carolina Beach.

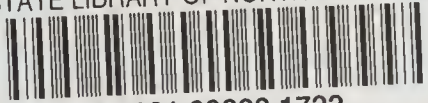
As part of the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program, Nathan also participated in an underwater archaeological study of Civil War shipwrecks lying off of Fort Fisher. Working with UAU staff members and ECU students under the direction of Billy Ray Morris and Marianne Franklin, detailed examinations were made of six shipwrecks. These included the blockade runners *Arabian*, *Condor*, and *Stormy Petrel*, the Union blockade vessel USS *Aster*, the former Army transport steamer *Flambeau*, which was lost after the war, and a shipwreck thought to be the USS *Louisiana*, but now suspected to be the *Twilight*, that sank in November 1865. The Fort Fisher project will provide research for several ECU theses and may eventually result in the formation of a historic shipwreck preserve. ■

*For more information contact Richard Lawrence or Mark Wilde-Ramsing, Underwater Archaeology Unit, Fort Fisher*





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