



Tributaries

A Publication
of the North
Carolina Maritime
History Council

October 2005
Number 13

Alexander Spotswood: Lieutenant Governor - Pirate Hunter

“Death all around us”: Yellow Fever in Wilmington, 1862

North Carolina Deadrise Skiffs

Book Review





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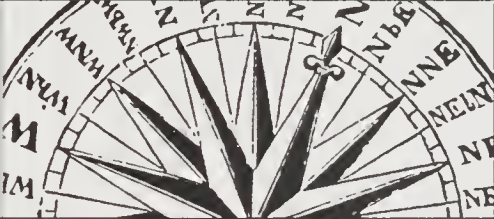



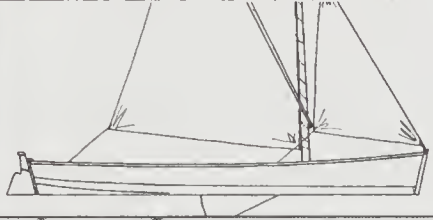
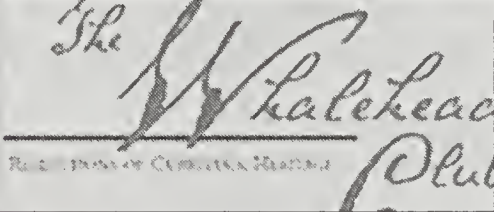
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About

the Maritime History Council

What is North Carolina's maritime history? It's dugout canoes, pirate ships, southern ironclads, and British blockade runners. Ships of exploration, vessels for victory, and countless craft of every description tie the Tar Heel State to the world's waterways.

The North Carolina Maritime History Council brings together all the elements that comprise our nautical heritage. It is a rich heritage, one that tells tales of high drama and unfortunate tragedy. Often one finds the state's economic and social development to be synonymous with its relation to the creeks, rivers, and sea. The production of tar, pitch, and turpentine, for instance, kept fleets afloat while providing a livelihood for innumerable North Carolinians for almost two hundred years. It is, in fact, why we are called Tar Heels.

The passion for maritime history motivated a group of like-minded individuals to form the North Carolina Maritime History Council in 1988. They incorporated the Council as a non-profit entity in 1990.

The Council's bylaws state the mission as "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 can already claim many accomplishments, including:

- The purchase of the Edwin Champney drawings—a collection of fifty-nine sketches of coastal scenes from the Civil War period that were obtained using funds donated by the Frank Stick Trust and other nonprofit groups.
- Serving as the principal grant recipient for the *Queen Anne's Revenge* archaeological project.
- Publishing *Tributaries* since 1991, North Carolina's only maritime history journal.
- Conducting an annual conference on North Carolina maritime heritage.
- Creating a register of North Carolina historic vessels.

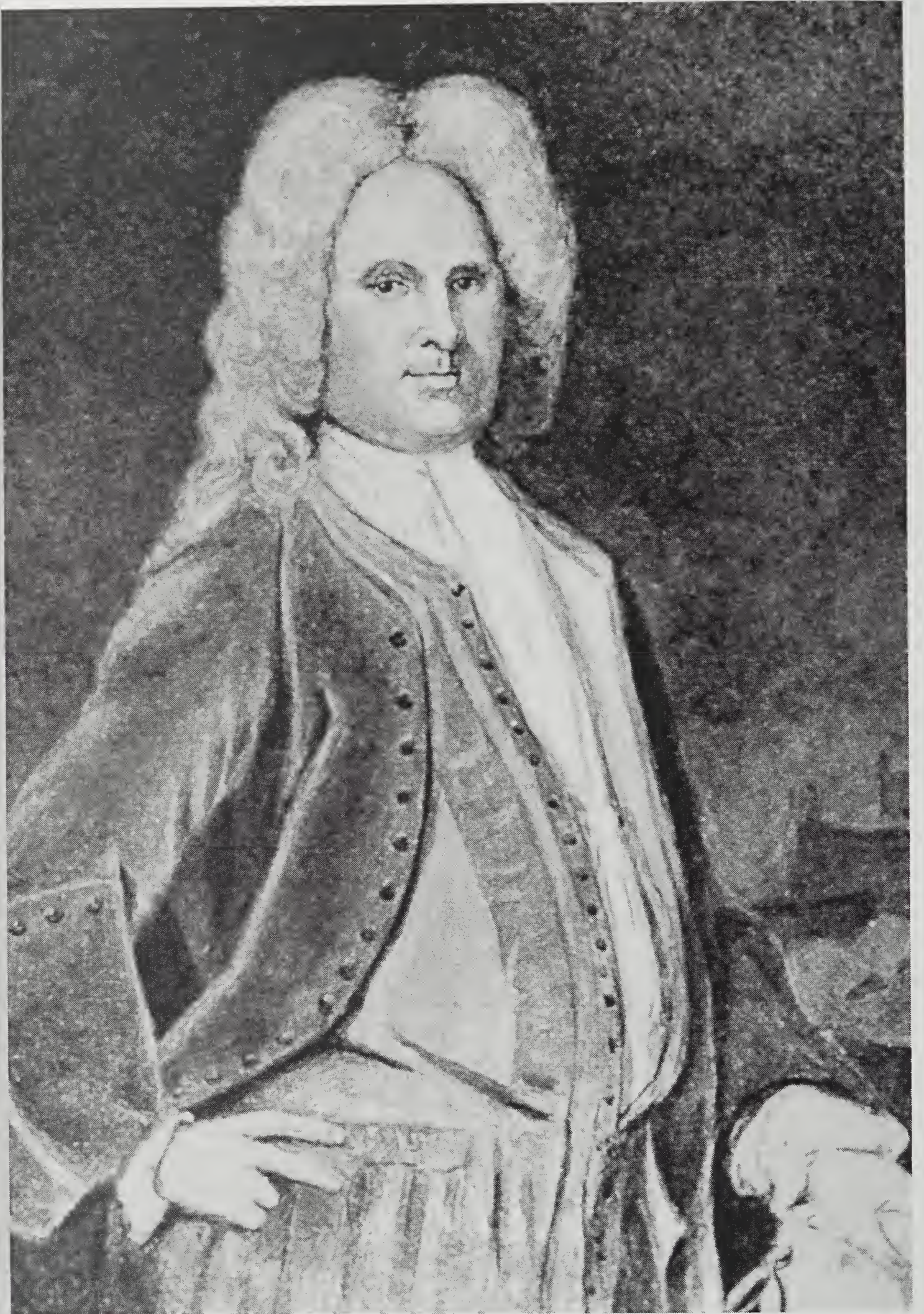
Council membership is open to individuals and institutions interested in maritime history. We encourage this membership to seek ways to pool resources, share information, and discuss issues to benefit the dissemination of our mutual maritime heritage.

This issue of *Tributaries* contains a variety of topics that demonstrate North Carolina's multi-faceted maritime history. The Council feels privileged to publish work by such well-qualified contributors.

Harry S. Warren,
Chair



Tributaries



Alexander Spotswood:

Lieutenant Governor-Pirate Hunter

by David S. Krop

Program in Maritime Studies, East Carolina University

Alexander Spotswood stepped ashore at Jamestown on 21 June 1710. Born in Scotland and raised in England, Spotswood began a promising military career in the Earl of Bath's foot regiment, quickly rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel. During the War of Spanish Succession, a cannonball struck Spotswood in the chest, and he spent months as a captive in Oudenarde.¹ After his recovery and release, he had a great change in fortune. With the end of the war in sight, Spotswood received an offer to become the deputy of the Earl of Orkney, George Hamilton, governor of Virginia. Hamilton was a fellow Scot and soldier, and requested the services of Spotswood in country while he remained in Britain.² The time was right for a career change, and he readily accepted. Accordingly, Spotswood had the opportunity to support his country while simultaneously climbing the social scale through political participation.

As Spotswood assumed the role of lieutenant governor amidst the oppressive heat and humidity of the Mid-Atlantic, he faced a type of war not fought by great armies on land. Pirates and privateers stalked the waters from Canada to the Caribbean, adversely affecting trade in colonial America during his tenure from 1710 through 1722. Spotswood took great measures, sometimes deemed unconstitutional, to eliminate the threat of piracy and secure the prosperity of the colonies. He strengthened coastal fortifications, increased the number of guardships patrolling the region, and created formidable anti-piracy legislation. Spotswood even personally organized and financed a campaign that stopped the notorious Blackbeard, thereby greatly disrupting piracy on the Atlantic coast during his administration.

Prior to Lieutenant Governor Spotswood's arrival in Virginia privateers regularly harassed British colonial shipping in the Atlantic and Caribbean.

The constant threat of war in Europe drove the colonies to utter panic and tested the weak Chesapeake defense system. In May 1706, Captain Robert Thomson received a report that "8 French men of war of 70 guns each 12 frigots & 40 Privateers after haveing taken and destroyed all the Island of St. Christophers except the Fort, sailed to Nevis and haveing landed 4000 men . . . may probably make an attempt on the Colony where no doubt they are informed there is so considerable a Fleet of Merchant Ships."³ The colony established a coast watch and authorized the construction of a battery at Jamestown. Authorities also reduced powder supplies and ammunition to the frontier by fifty percent. HMS *Woolwich* and HMS *Advice* increased their patrols of the Chesapeake Bay and capes, and the militia readied to march at any notice. Colonists living near the shore prepared to move their stocks and provisions inland in case of attack. Essentially, the colony scrambled to prepare for an attack it could not stop. The threat of attack spurred government action, but did little to strengthen the region. Luckily, the French fleet decided to convoy allied Spanish shipping, specifically the fleet of treasure galleons, back to Spain, but left Virginia concerned about future piratical invasion.⁴

Prince George, husband of Queen Anne, understood the dilemma faced by the colonies. HMS *Advice* typically patrolled the northern reaches of the Chesapeake Bay, particularly Maryland. But whenever Virginia requested its service, the vessel moved to protect southern shipping interests, thereby leaving pirates and privateers free to ravage shipping in Maryland. Simply stated, Maryland and Virginia needed more royal guardships. Prince George, conscious of the threat posed by pirates and privateers to British shipping bound for the colonies, issued an order on 4 October 1707 to Captain Stuart, commander of HMS *Guarland*, which stated that he was "hereby required & Directed, with her Majties

Left: Alexander Spotswood, lieutenant governor of Virginia, 1710–1722. (From Walter Havighurst, *Alexander Spotswood: Portrait of a Governor*, 1967)

ships under your Command, to take under your care and Protection the Trade which shall be at Bristoll, Biddeford & Barnstaple, bound to Virginia, and . . . you immediately give notice to ye Governor of that Colony, that I have appointed the ship under your Comand to Lye in Lynn Haven Bay & cruise about ye Capes, for Protecting the Country & Trades from ye insults of ye Enemies Privateers”⁵ George extended the duties and freedom of Captain Stuart, ordering him to take, sink, burn, or destroy any privateer caught harassing colonial commerce. But the most critical element of the proclamation stipulated that the government of Virginia held ultimate authority over the vessel. If at any time Virginia required the *Guarland* for a specific action, Stuart was “to put in Execution the orders which shall be given you thereupon.”⁶ The final order offered the colony important flexibility. Instead of waiting for answers in response to urgent requests regarding the presence and duties of guardships, the colony could order the guardship anywhere to stave off expected privateers and pirates. Together, Britain and Virginia took small steps to remedy their situation and protect merchant vessels.

In time, though, such small steps proved ineffective. The *Guarland* wrecked outside Currituck Inlet on 29 November 1709, while pursuing an enemy vessel. Severe weather hampered the salvage operation; nothing was saved. HMS *Enterprize* caught wind of the situation and rushed south from New England, but the ship, being in a state of great disrepair, sailed into New York for refitting instead. The Chesapeake Bay was, once again, defenseless. In May 1710, privateers raided the coast of Virginia. They plundered numerous houses and attacked the *William and Mary* of London, *James* of Plymouth, and burned the *Lark* of Falmouth to the water. Other privateers captured sloops outbound from North Carolina, and a thirty-gun privateer from the Caribbean was rumored near the capes of Virginia.⁷

The introduction of Lieutenant Governor Spotswood and his new administration in June 1710 brought pirate-hunting matters to fruition. Spotswood was a more ardent pirate hunter than Francis Nicholson, his predecessor, who professed that, “I have always abhorred such sort of profligate men and their barbarous actions; for sure they are the disgrace of mankind in general, and of the noble, valiant, generous English in

particular.”⁸ Despite such tough words, Nicholson took little action. In contrast, Spotswood moved quickly to bolster the safety of shipping and ordered the fifty-gun HMS *Deptford* and man-of-war *Bedford Galley* to remain in Virginia for ninety days. The British Admiralty allowed the captains only minor repairs before forcing them to actively patrol the Chesapeake Bay. The ships would eventually convoy a fleet back to England in the fall, but the three-month window allowed the lieutenant governor time to boost the colony’s defenses.⁹

The large guardships, including the *Deptford* and *Bedford Galley*, provided superior protection from one or two small privateers. But if a fleet of privateers banded together and attacked the slow, deep-draft guardships, the results would be disastrous. The vessels also moved to and from the Chesapeake Bay, providing inconsistent support for commerce. To solve this problem, Spotswood proposed the construction of a fort at Point Comfort:

And as to the defence of the Country, in the absence of Guard-ships, I cannot but be of Opinion that a small fort built upon Point Comfort would be of good use, the very name of it would strike an awe in the Enemy, it would afford a Retreat for Ships when pursued by Privateers in time of War or by Pirates . . . the place for careening her Maj’ties Ship being under the Cannon of it, they could not be surprised by the Enemy in that circumstance, and barracks might be built in it for the reception of the sick men belonging to her Maj’ty’s Ships, and thereby their Desertion prevented, which now frequently happens as soon as they begin to recover. The charge of erecting such a fort would be inconsiderable, but as the Country is unable to defray the charge of a Garrison, I humbly propose that her Majesty may be moved to send a Company of Invalides to do duty in it, which would be no greater expence than they now cost, and for the extraordinary Charge of the Garrison that they be defrayed out of her Majesty’s Quitt-rents.¹⁰

Spotswood’s suggestion was wise for numerous reasons. First, the proposed fort would offer superior protection from enemy privateers or



Detail of Chesapeake Bay and vicinity (From Homann Heirs, *Dominia Anglorum in America Septentrionali. Specialibus Mappis Londini primum a Mollio edita nunc recusa ab Homannianis Hered.*, 1737)

pirates. Second, vessels could easily careen below the safety of the cannon instead of heading to New York to refit, leaving the Chesapeake Bay defenseless. Third, by placing injured soldiers and sailors in the garrison, Spotswood gambled that these men would be least likely to desert to the merchant marine or become planters. Fourth, he tried to defray the cost of the fort from quit-rents. Finally, though not included above, the lieutenant governor strengthened the whole package by suggesting reinforcement of the garrison with trained militia in time of emergency or attack. The militia would skillfully operate the cannon, ward off attackers, and stand a better chance of survival fighting behind fortified walls than in open combat with pirates or privateers on land. The Board of Trade and Virginia Assembly were unwilling to fund additional troops and rejected

the idea outright, leaving the proposed garrison on the drawing board. They did, however, agree to Spotswood's less urgent request for a man-of-war and sloop to counter illicit trade between the lower James River district and St. Thomas and Curaçao in the Caribbean.¹¹

The War of Spanish Succession, or Queen Anne's War, which drew to a close in 1713 with the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht, raised great problems for Lieutenant Governor Spotswood. During the war, incidents of privateering were extremely frequent in the Chesapeake. With captains receiving letters of marque allowing them to attack enemy shipping, Virginia witnessed regular attacks by privateers and little pirate activity. Despite the hostility Spotswood slowly lapsed from reality, believing the guardships could defend the region from enemy

vessels. He carelessly ignored a petition by worried planters for an additional man-of-war for protection. Spotswood felt assured any resurgence in piracy would take place in the Caribbean, far away from the tobacco fleets of Virginia.¹² As the war ended, “some seamen had never known anything but life aboard a privateer. Thousands were thrown out of work. Poverty drove them to crime, and experience drove them to piracy. There was no great danger involved in the changeover; guardships were too few and too widely spaced to constitute a real threat.”¹³

Spotswood was correct in his assumption that piracy would flourish in the Caribbean, yet he failed to understand the magnitude of the problem. Within three years of the Treaty of Utrecht, an estimated 1500 pirates cruised the coast of North America. Public hangings proved to be a weak deterrent. Many more thousands of “unknown, and perhaps more adept, pirates” sought riches in the Caribbean.¹⁴ Spotswood slowly took notice of the worsening situation, particularly at New Providence in the Bahamas, an area lacking governmental administration following the close of the war. “I have receiv’d information upon Oath that a number of profligate fellows have possess’d themselves of the Island of Providence. That the Crews . . . are preparing to settle at Providence, and to strengthen themselves there against any power that shall attack them. Your Lo’ps will be pleas’d to consider the dangerous Consequences of suffering such a Nest of Rogues to settle in the very mouth of the Gulph of Florida, where . . . the whole Trade of this Continent may be endangered if timely measures be not taken to suppress this growing evil.”¹⁵

Notorious pirates Captain Samuel Bellamy and Benjamin Hornigold led crews from the West Indies to Virginia. In March 1717, Bellamy and the *Whido Galley* harassed colonial shipping in Virginia.¹⁶ Bellamy focused on incoming vessels with their cargoes of rich, European goods. He captured the *Agnes* from Bermuda, a ship laden with rum and sugar, and also attacked the *Anne* of Glasgow and the *Endeavor* of Brighton.¹⁷ On 19 April 1717, the Council of Virginia made the following statement: “There is Cruising about the Capes a Ship of 28 Guns and 200 Men formerly call’d the Widda Galley and also a Sloop of about 10 Guns & that divers other Pyrates are likewise Expected . . . Considering the Inability of this Country to Arm out Vessels for the Guard of the Coast it is not possible the Trade can be protected

nor the Pyrates Suppressed unless some of his Matys Ships of War be sent hither for that purpose.”¹⁸ This desperate plea for help mirrors the weak state of colonial defense. Luckily for Spotswood and the colonies, one of the last vessels captured by Bellamy carried a cargo of wine. As the crew became increasingly intoxicated, their navigational abilities decreased. The drunken crew failed to handle the ship during a storm and ran aground near Eastham on Cape Cod.

Spotswood’s plan for cleaning up New Providence and the Caribbean involved reestablishing law and order in the Bahamas. The British government appointed Captain Woodes Rogers to be governor of the Bahamas and provided him with a small naval and military force.¹⁹ Despite being armed with a naval escort and troops, Rogers’ ace in the hole was a royal proclamation promising pardons for piracies committed before 1718. “It was specified that they could surrender to any governor or lieutenant governor in the colonies. This was a remarkable document in that pirates were forgiven all murders they had committed, and they were allowed to retain their accumulated loot. In a sense, it was an open admission that the situation had grown desperate and was out of the control of government.”²⁰ Many pirates surrendered to wipe their slates clean of crimes. The notorious Benjamin Hornigold accepted the royal pardon and was even hired by Rogers to track down former crewmembers. Yet the number of pirates did not decrease in the slightest; most could not resist the urge to return to piracy. Many pirates were also logwood cutters, but after the Spanish drove out English loggers, they found employment in the Bay of Campeche. They rejoined their former mates and headed to sea. Competition for prizes increased to an alarming degree, and pirates crept north to the capes of Virginia. Once again, merchants dared not venture without a royal escort. Consequently, the British Admiralty and Lieutenant Governor Spotswood struggled to curb piracy in the Caribbean.²¹

If one man stood at the forefront of Spotswood’s pirate problem, he was Edward Thatch, alias Blackbeard the Pirate. During the War of Spanish Succession, Thatch sailed as a privateer out of Kingston, Jamaica, but ultimately signed the articles of the company under Benjamin Hornigold. Hornigold quickly recognized Thatch’s courage and ability and placed him in

command of a six-gun sloop, the captured French vessel, the *Concorde*. Thatch, gaining the confidence of a large portion of the crew, separated from Hornigold, and converted the *Concorde* into a forty-gun pirate ship renamed the *Queen Anne's Revenge*.²² Thatch eventually met Stede Bonnet and together took numerous prizes in the West Indies. Learning of the royal proclamation pardoning all pirates, Thatch sailed to Bath, North Carolina in January 1718 and surrendered to Governor Charles Eden. As with many pirates, this was merely an insurance policy for Blackbeard, who soon planned another voyage. Governor Eden and the secretary of the colony, Tobias Knight, both covertly supported Blackbeard, providing crucial informal protection from persecution in North Carolina.

This situation greatly worried Lieutenant Governor Spotswood. Thatch, stronger than ever, soon headed south to the Bay of Honduras, where he captured the sloop *Adventure*. Thatch and four hundred experienced crewmembers now controlled the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, *Adventure*, *Stede Bonnet's Revenge*, and several smaller sloops. In May 1718, Thatch blockaded Charleston harbor, took several ships, and demanded medical supplies under threat of bombardment of the city. By the time he re-surrendered to Governor Eden, Thatch and Bonnet had captured at least twenty-eight prizes in the West Indies and southern colonies.²³

Spotswood realized Governor Eden conspired repeatedly with Thatch and decided to curb the menace by any means possible. On 24 November 1718, without consulting Governor Eden, Spotswood issued the following proclamation, concerning rewards for killing or apprehending pirates, specifically Blackbeard:

All and every Person, or Persons, who . . . shall take any Pyrate, or Pyrates, on the Sea or Land, or in Case of Resistance, shall kill any such Pyrate, or Pyrates, between the Degrees of thirty four, and thirty nine, of Northern Latitude, and within one hundred Leagues of Virginia, or North-Carolina, upon the Conviction, or making due Proof of the killing of all, and every such Pyrate, and Pyrates, before the Governor and Council, shall be entitled to have, and receive out of the publick Money . . . the several Rewards following; that is to

say, for Edward Teach, commonly call'd Captain Teach, or Black-Beard one hundred Pounds, for every other Commander of a Pyrate Ship, Sloop, or Vessel, forty Pounds; for every Lieutenant, Master, or Quarter-Master, Boatswain, or Carpenter, twenty Pounds . . . and that for every Pyrate, which shall be taken by any Ship, Sloop, or Vessel, belonging to this Colony, or North-Carolina . . . the like Rewards shall be paid according to the Quality and Condition of such Pyrates. I have thought fit, with the Advice and Consent of his Majesty's Council, to issue this Proclamation, hereby declaring, the said Rewards shall be punctually and justly paid, in current Money of Virginia, according to the Directions of the said Act.²⁴

While Spotswood sought to destroy the entire brotherhood of pirates, his immediate and primary concern was the elimination of Edward Thatch. Thatch, he believed, threatened to "engulf the Virginia trade and the very shores of the Chesapeake itself."²⁵

Prior to issuing the proclamation, Spotswood organized a highly secret operation to stop Blackbeard. Fearing an intelligence leak, he only spoke with those vital to the success of his operation. Spotswood did not consult the Virginia Assembly or Council, let alone the North Carolina government. Instead, he requested the services of pilots familiar with the shoal-filled waters of North Carolina, and queried Captain Ellis Brand and Captain George Gordon about the feasibility of the secret mission.²⁶ They replied that the HMS *Lyme* and HMS *Pearl* were impractical for the mission due to their deep drafts, but the captains were willing to supply fifty-five men and Lieutenant Robert Maynard to command them if two smaller craft could be found.²⁷ The lieutenant governor understood the importance of shallow-draft vessels for the operation and hired two sloops and pilots out of his own pocket. This move alone reflects his burning desire to snuff out piracy in colonial America. The plan called for Brand to march to Bath with armed troops, Maynard to approach by water, and Gordon to protect the *Lyme* and *Pearle* in the James River. As final insurance, Spotswood promised "a bonus from the Virginia Assembly over and above the reward they would



Edward Thatch or
Blackbeard (From Charles
Johnson, *A General
History of Pyrates*, 1724)

receive under the King's proclamation." ²⁸ He feared Royal Navy sailors would desert or join Blackbeard as opposed to fighting their fierce foe to the death.

On 17 November, Maynard left Kecoughtan, Virginia, with the *Jane* and *Ranger*. Each sloop carried thirty-two men, but, unfortunately, no cannon. To compensate for this lack, the sloops carried extensive small arms. ²⁹ Captain Brand also left for Bath the same day, hoping to capture Thatch onshore. He arrived in Bath on 23 November and sought out Governor Eden on the whereabouts of Blackbeard. Eden revealed nothing, so Brand dispatched two canoes to scout for information. Only then did he learn that

Maynard and Blackbeard had crossed swords at Ocracoke Inlet the previous day. ³⁰

On 22 November, Blackbeard heard reports of a possible attack in progress, but refused to believe them. Consequently, only twenty-five men remained aboard his vessel. Nevertheless, when he saw Maynard's sloops approaching, he established a defensive position. As Maynard approached with oar and sail, Blackbeard unleashed broadsides at the sloops, which the lieutenant's men returned with small arms fire. When finally within shouting range Blackbeard hailed Maynard: "Damn you for Villains, who are you? And, from whence you came? Damnation seize my Soul if I give you Quarters,

or take any from you." Maynard replied that, "he expected no Quarters from him, nor should he give him any."³¹ Blackbeard, accompanied by fourteen men, boarded Maynard's sloop and engaged in the final battle of his life. The lieutenant successfully completed Spotswood's task of ridding the colonies of their most menacing foe. The contemporary author, Captain Charles Johnson, commented, "here was an End of that courageous Brute, who might have pass'd in the World of A Heroe, had he been employ'd in a good Cause; his Destruction, which was of such Consequence to the Plantations, was entirely owing to the Conduct and Bravery of Lieutenant Maynard and his Men, who might have destroy'd him with much less Loss, had they had a Vessel with great Guns . . ."³² But this claim is slightly erroneous. Yes, Maynard and his men may have suffered less loss with the aid of cannon, but the destruction of Blackbeard was not "entirely owing to the conduct . . . of Lieutenant Maynard." Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood played the largest role in the defeat of Blackbeard. Spotswood had the fortitude to single-handedly pursue the notorious pirate when the governor of North Carolina would not. It was Spotswood who realized Thatch could gain control of colonial commerce, damaging the stability and prosperity of North America. When Royal Navy captains and the colonial government refused to foot the bill for obtaining and outfitting two sloops for the pursuit, Spotswood opened his personal coffers to fully support the covert mission. Maynard should be praised for his bravery, but Spotswood deserves the credit for masterminding and managing this critical event in the history of colonial America.

In a personal letter to Lord John Cartwright, a member of North Carolina's Lords Proprietors, Spotswood addressed the problem posed by Blackbeard and the ultimate resolution. "Upon the repeated Applications of Trading People of that Province [North Carolina], and the Advice that Tach had taken and brought in hither a Ship Laden wth Sugar and Cocoa without either men or Papers, I thought it necessary to put a Stop to ye further Progress of the Robberys, and for that purpose, having prevailed with our Assembly to give considerable Rewards for the Apprehending and destroying of these and other Pirates I hired two Sloops, furnished them wth Pilotts from Carolina, concerted wth the Capt's of his Maj'ty's Ships on this Station the proper Measures for extirpating that Gang of Pyrates."³³

Spotswood viewed the problem of piracy as an issue best resolved through his own actions. His duty logically extended beyond the border of Virginia into North Carolina due to Governor Eden's own failure to prohibit piracy.

Following the death of Blackbeard and capture of six members of his crew in Bath issues arose concerning the trial of the pirates and legality of Spotswood's actions. Governor Eden challenged the validity of Spotswood's operation, claiming the lieutenant governor of Virginia exceeded his authority by sending troops into North Carolina. He believed the pirates, who submitted to the "Act of Grace," were under his legal protection and deserved a fair trial in North Carolina.³⁴ Thomas Pollack, attorney for the six accused pirates, suggested to Eden that, "as for the trial of the men, if they have it in Virginia, it [will] ease your Honour of a great deal of trouble and take off the odium of it from this Government."³⁵

Spotswood ignored Eden's outcry. He preferred to make an example of the captive pirates through public hanging. Moreover, as Tobias Knight's relationship with Blackbeard unfolded via evidence supplied by accused pirate Israel Hands, Eden could no longer ignore the charges against his colonial secretary. Hands suggested Knight offered sanctuary to Blackbeard and his crew in exchange for monetary kickbacks. In response, Eden held a Governor's Council in which Knight defended his actions. The Council of North Carolina supported Knight and cleared him of all charges, possibly to spite Spotswood. All of the accused were eventually hanged in Virginia, save Israel Hands and Samuel Odell, who proved Blackbeard forced him into service. Oddly enough, however, some of Maynard's crew who engaged Blackbeard in Ocracoke eventually went on the account for themselves. The confiscated pirate booty was sold in Virginia for the sum of £2,247 19s. 7d.³⁶

As a result of the Blackbeard incident, Eden's good reputation was certainly in question. Spotswood, too, faced harsh criticism for his actions. Political enemies of the lieutenant governor claimed he demanded a fee from every pirate who accepted the King's Proclamation and had even denied Blackbeard the rights associated with the proclamation. The Virginia House of Burgesses also made Spotswood look bad. The burgesses were highly reluctant to appropriate the necessary funds to pay "expenses incurred in

the capture of the pirates.”³⁷ Spotswood offered to pay the difference from his own pocket. Despite these problems, positive results did emerge. Spotswood, for instance, received high praises from North Carolina merchants, the governor of Maryland, and the College of William and Mary. But considering the origin of the struggle between Spotswood and Eden, Blackbeard managed to stir controversy in the colonies long after his death.

As his administration neared its end in 1721, Spotswood continued his personal quest to rid the Chesapeake Bay and the surrounding seas of pirates and privateers. He continued to emphasize his conviction that no single man-of-war in America was strong enough to defeat a pirate as powerful and smart as Bartholomew Roberts and his swashbuckling crew, but also reiterated the difficulties of bringing guardships together from two different locations to defend a single area. These blatant admissions suggest the almost impossible nature of Spotswood’s anti-piracy crusade, however, he maintained to the end of his administration that a successful colonial defense hinged on at least one forty- or fifty-gun warship to convoy merchant vessels and a shallow draft vessel to chase pirates up creeks and around shoals.³⁸ Spotswood was a true pirate fighter and colonial defender through his last days in office.

William Gooch, whose administration extended some twenty years after that of Spotswood, held similarly little trust in the state of guardships in the region. Like Spotswood, he believed heavily fortified shore batteries placed at strategic locations along the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and rivers could provide sufficient defense for the colony. Gooch sought to upgrade the initial river batteries and construct a new fortification at Point Comfort.³⁹ Gooch’s belief in the importance of strategic shore batteries, particularly Point Comfort, was a fitting tribute to the imaginative ideas of Lieutenant Governor Spotswood. Although Spotswood’s visionary, anti-piratical concepts did not always materialize rapidly, they did appear later with similar importance.

How successful was the famed pirate-hunter in removing the threat of piracy from the Chesapeake? Two years after the conclusion of his administration (1724), Spotswood remained in Virginia awaiting a safe opportunity to travel to London. He dared not leave unless on the

deck of a well-armed man-of-war. He wrote, “your Lordships will easily conceive my Meaning when you reflect on the Vigorous part I’ve acted to suppress Pirates: and if those barbarous Wretches can be moved to cut off the Nose & Ears of a Master but for correcting his own Sailors, what inhuman treatment must I expect, should I fall within their power, who have been markt as the principle object of their vengeance, for cutting off their arch Pirate Thatch”⁴⁰ Pirates continued to threaten the lightly defended colonies, prompting Spotswood to fear for his safety. Nevertheless, Spotswood’s policies caused pirates extreme difficulties, disrupting the way of life of renegade sailors from the Chesapeake Bay to the Caribbean. In response to his effective proclamations and legislation, pirates sought vengeance on Spotswood himself. Regardless of the interpretation of Spotswood’s letter to the Board of Trade, the lieutenant governor was an ardent, successful pirate hunter. He proposed strong military fortifications along the banks of the James River and Chesapeake Bay and made countless attempts to increase the number and strength of guardships patrolling the region. Spotswood’s administration also devoted great effort to weakening the pirate stronghold of New Providence in the Bahamas. He aided Woodes Rogers’ attempts to secure the Caribbean and initially supported a policy of pirate amnesty. Realizing the futile nature of the amnesty, though, he created fierce anti-piracy legislation calling for the capture, death, or trial of any manner of pirate. Finally, he personally organized and financed the campaign responsible for wiping Blackbeard from the face of colonial America forever. Despite comments and criticisms from his political opponents, Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood clearly embodied the role of a successful pirate hunter and minimized pirate intrusion while in office.

Endnotes

1. Leonidas Dodson, *Alexander Spotswood: Governor of Colonial Virginia, 1710–1722* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), 5.
2. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
3. H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia: 1 May 1705–23 October 1721* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1875), 3:88.
4. Donald G. Shomette, *Pirates on the Chesapeake: Being a True History of Pirates, Picaroons, and Raiders on the Chesapeake Bay, 1610–1807* (Centreville, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1985), 166–167.
5. William P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts, 1652–1781* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1875), 1:116.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Shomette, 173–174.
8. Quoted in Hugh F. Rankin, *The Golden Age of Piracy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 53.
9. Shomette, 174–175.
10. Spotswood to the Lords Commissioners of Trade, 18 August 1710, in *The Official Letters of Alexander Spotswood, Lieutenant Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1710–1722*, ed. Robert A. Brock (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1882), 1:11–12.
11. Shomette, 175.
12. *Ibid.*, 178.
13. Rankin, 82.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Spotswood to the Lords of the Admiralty, 3 July 1716, in Brock, 2:168.
16. Rankin, 88.
17. *Ibid.*, 89.
18. McIlwaine, 3:443.
19. Shomette, 188. Rogers, a former privateer, captured the Manila galleon, sacked the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador, and circumnavigated the globe.
20. Rankin, 90–91.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 106–107.
23. *Ibid.*, 112.
24. Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Pyrates* (London: C. Rivington, J. Lacy, and J. Stone, 1724; New York: Carol and Graff Publishers, 1999), 62–63. Citations are to the Carol and Graff edition, edited by Richard West.
25. Shomette, 209.
26. Johnson, 62.
27. Shomette, 209.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, 210.
30. *Ibid.*, 211.
31. Johnson, 65.
32. *Ibid.*, 67.
33. Brock, 273–274.
34. Rankin, 124–125.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 129.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Shomette, 238.
39. *Ibid.*, 244.
40. Alexander Spotswood to the Board of Trade, 16 June 1724, quoted in Marcus Rediker, “‘Under the Banner of King Death’: The Social World of Anglo–American Pirates, 1716–1726,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d. ser., 38 (1981): 203–227.



Tributaries



“Death all around us”: Yellow Fever in Wilmington, 1862

by Benjamin H. Trask



Aedes Egypti mosquito,
principal carrier of
Yellow Fever

Gustave Doré, “Death
and Companion” (From
Samuel Coleridge, *The
Rhyme of the Ancient
Mariner*, 1875)

The Civil War blockade runners that supported the Confederacy have an enduring legacy. Bold ship masters and mercenary crews pitted their swift steamers against the Union naval squadrons. An unsuccessful run denied the Confederacy essential supplies and weapons. If the Union sailors captured one of the fleet transports, the crew earned prize money. Conversely, if the run was successful, the risky effort meant great rewards for the runner’s crew and the returning vessel transported cotton to British mills. This risky cat and mouse game revolved around speed and daring, as any delay could cost the owners, the officers, and the crew their money. As the war unfolded, the Confederate port of Wilmington, North Carolina became a hub for this vital activity.

The seaport’s location twenty miles from the mouth of the Cape Fear River, its distance from Nassau (570 miles) and Bermuda (674 miles), and rail connections to Richmond and Charleston made it ideal for blockade running operations. Furthermore, the treacherous North Carolina coast off Cape Fear and favorable currents and winds kept the federal warships at bay.

Despite the harbor’s logistical and geographical advantages, the Confederates were slow to improve the defenses.¹

The forts near the river’s delta, such as Fort Fisher, were under the immediate command of Colonel William Lamb of Norfolk. The resolute officer was married to a Rhode Island lady, Sarah Anne Chaffee Lamb, who spent much of the war near her husband’s post. In the first winter of the war, Sarah Lamb informed her parents, “I like Wilmington very much—it is a pretty place and the people are refined and polite. I have had a great many calls and I think I shall find good friends, the streets of the city are wide and the houses are all separate and have very pretty gardens and . . . there are a great many elegant houses and public buildings.”²

A portentous event, however, would alter Sarah Lamb’s musings and would become a determining factor on how quickly some of the blockade runners expressed cargo in and out of the port. In the late summer of 1862, Wilmington’s *Daily Journal* reported a series of apparently unrelated stories that were linked to bring

disaster. The paper mentioned the triumphant arrival of the blockade runner *Kate*, the appearance of yellow fever in Key West, Florida, the return of the summer heat, and that “the mosquitoes [were] numerous.”³ Finally, far above the hovering insects, an emerging, perhaps apocryphal, heavenly body appeared that “may yet become a . . . comet.”⁴

The *Kate* reached Wilmington from the West Indies under the command of Captain Thomas J. Lockwood. She arrived on 6 August, at a wharf along the foot of Market Street, amid much excitement. On subsequent trips, the little steamer carried cases of rifles, mess tins, and knapsacks, packages of tarpaulins, bales of blankets, and kegs of powder. Unbeknownst to the celebrants, the ship also imported yellow fever. The *Kate*, however, returned to Nassau before the fever had engulfed the unsuspecting denizens. By October, the local paper reported that the *Kate* was the source of the fever, but cautioned against acts of revenge. When the steamer returned on a third trip, she was placed in quarantine. Fatefully, the following month, the *Kate* hit a snag on the Cape Fear bar and was lost.⁵

It should be noted, however, that an article in the *Confederate States Medical & Surgical Journal*, authored by Dr. William T. Wragg, identified a handful of individuals that were sick with an ailment very similar to yellow fever before the *Kate*'s arrival.⁶ Wragg, who traveled from Charleston to Wilmington, based much of his article on the observations of local physicians. The physician's piece also described the city's refuse, exposed drainage ponds, flooded basements, and noted “the hygiene condition of the city” was “terrible in the extreme.”⁷ He approached the epidemic from a sanitarian's point of view; that is, yellow fever was of local origins, or at the least, was greatly enhanced by hot, humid weather and filthy urban conditions. Despite Wragg's report, the fever's momentum was dated from the discovery of ill crew members of the *Kate* by local officials at the time of the outbreak. Later, historians have also ignored the possibility that the fever came from other or additional sources.

In the decade prior to the national schism, yellow fever ravaged Southern ports. In 1853, at least 9,000 people died in New Orleans. Along the coastline, the disease struck from Norfolk to Galveston, including Wilmington. The urban-

dwelling *Aedes aegypti* mosquito was the vector. During the warm months, indigenous female mosquitoes sought a blood meal for the nutrients needed to ovulate. The virus, on the other hand, had to be imported via mosquitoes or sick humans into seaports. In cooler weather, the mosquito did not lay eggs and, therefore, did not seek a blood meal. A chilling frost became the meteorological signal to the Southerners that the fever would soon abate. At times, authorities required quarantined vessels to fly a yellow flag. From this requirement, the disease became also known as “yellow jack.”⁸

During the Civil War, yellow fever raged on the Caribbean islands. Yellow jack plagued sailors and Marines in the Union, Confederate, and British Royal navies and merchant mariners.⁹ Havana and Nassau were two important harbors marked as harbingers of the pathogen. Given the speed of the blockade runners and the desperate need for supplies, the conditions were ripe to ferry the dreaded virus into the Southland. The first crew member of the *Kate* to show signs of the fever was a fireman named O'Donohoe. The fireman slipped into delirium, strayed from the ship, and wandered the town. After more than a day on the streets, he was hospitalized in the marine hospital, where he died. Later, seaman Dennis Mitchel died at the Campbell residence. Wragg reported that shortly thereafter, the Campbell family perished of the fever.¹⁰ And so the disease spread by infectious mosquitoes from the crew to other town residents.

As the fever gained momentum, perhaps as many as two-thirds of the ten thousand townspeople fled. Defenders and government employees soon followed. The disease, described by blockade runner supercargo Thomas E. Taylor as that “demon, yellow Jack,” even took the lives of fleeing citizens who reached Wrightsville Sound, Lumberton, Fayetteville, and Clinton.¹¹ Local farmers ceased sending produce and livestock to market. Firewood and staples, such as bacon and corn, became scarce. Naturally, the scarcity drove food prices upwards. A volunteer for one relief organizations lamented, “that our people could hardly obtain any article, even of the absolute necessity. The stores have all been closed, their provisions gone—the doors locked.”¹² And in the well-tended gardens that caught the eye of Sarah Lamb, the newspaper noted that “even the flowers, neglected and run wild, as they too often are in the gardens of deserted houses.”¹³

Fear also hampered transportation, trade, and communication links. As a precaution, Archibald McLean, the mayor of Fayetteville, proclaimed all "intercourse with Wilmington has been suspended, and sanitary regulations adopted, by which it is hoped no further cases will be introduced."¹⁴ Likewise, the Commissioners of Lumberton resolved that "no person shall be allowed to come from the town of Wilmington . . . under penalty of five hundred dollar [sic] for each and every offence."¹⁵

Chief telegraph operator Joseph Durnin died of the fever at the end of October. His eulogy noted, he "died here in the flower of his youth."¹⁶ Lamenting the loss of operators such as Durnin, the *Charleston Courier* moaned, "cannot an acclimated operator be sent to take charge of the telegraph in Wilmington, N.C."¹⁷ The print news media also suffered. *The Daily Journal*, which posted announcements, served as the daily diary, and listed obituaries and funeral arrangements, downsized to a single-sheet handbill under the banner *Journal Office*. The causes included a lack of paper, a shortage of carriers, and the "thinning off of the number of those engaged" at the paper's office. The *Journal's* staff dwindled to two proprietors, with two boys and an African American working as compositors (typesetters).¹⁸

While railroads carried relief supplies to the town free of charge, executives also curtailed service, disrupting mail service and the flow of contributions. When the officers of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad did not meet because of the epidemic, the *Journal* requested that the officials grant "authority to parties here to act for them."¹⁹ The rail problems rippled southward. South Carolina diarist Emma Holmes and her friends arrived at a train depot to offer soldiers refreshments. Holmes noted that, "there were no soldiers & we heard that they were forbidden to come this way on account of the fever in Wilmington. So the next day no one went & a number of famished solders were begging for food."²⁰

Certainly the graphic symptoms of the fever added to the grip of horror. A few days after being bitten by an infectious mosquito, the afflicted suffered headaches, nausea, internal and external bleeding, suppressed urination, back and neck pains, and high fever. Others fell into delirium and had to be restrained. Particularly unnerving

was the ejection of partially digested blood that resembled coffee grounds. Witnesses branded this last symptom as the black vomit, and it was thought to be a death knell. In Wilmington, the *Journal* reported on the good condition of most of the patients in a hospital. However, when a female patient with the "black vomit appeared in its most decided form," doctors told the reporter this "was the only hopeless case."²¹ In the final stages, Wragg noted, doomed sufferers were "often putrid and offensive before the citadel of life fairly yielded to the enemy."²²

A week into the illness, the patient might appear to recover only to fall into a relapse and die. Not everyone exhibited all the symptoms, and many cases were mild or asymptomatic. Although a mild case might be a blessing, it probably resulted in dispersing the disease among the citizens. Despite the war, the people of Wilmington reacted to the fever as many Southerners had during the Antebellum era. Some of the people of means or with kinfolk in the interior fled from the disease. Others thought they had immunity to the fever or assumed that their wholesome lifestyle would mitigate the effects of the fever, so they stayed. Poor whites and slaves remained in town and hoped for the best.²³

An extraordinary set of letters apparently written by slaves owned by the De Rosset family gave touching details of life in the besieged city. One of the notes written by a slave, named Bella De Rosset, was addressed to her "Affectionate Mistress" and closed, "Remain your affectionate servant untill death."²⁴ The documents detail the suffering of the De Rosset slaves and reported on the well being of the community. Bella De Rosset lamented that the "Provisions are very few here & manly all the stores are shut up the town looks lonesome most all the people has left these are eight or ten doctors here from Savannah & Charleston & nurses the feaver seems not to be quite so bad to day four or five deaths to day 6 last night."²⁵ Bella De Rosset may have been the slave of railroad executive, Armand John De Rosset, Jr., and her mistress may have been Eliza Jane Lord De Rosset. The De Rossets spent time in Hillsborough and Chapel Hill during the war while Armand De Rosset visited Wilmington to conduct railroad business.

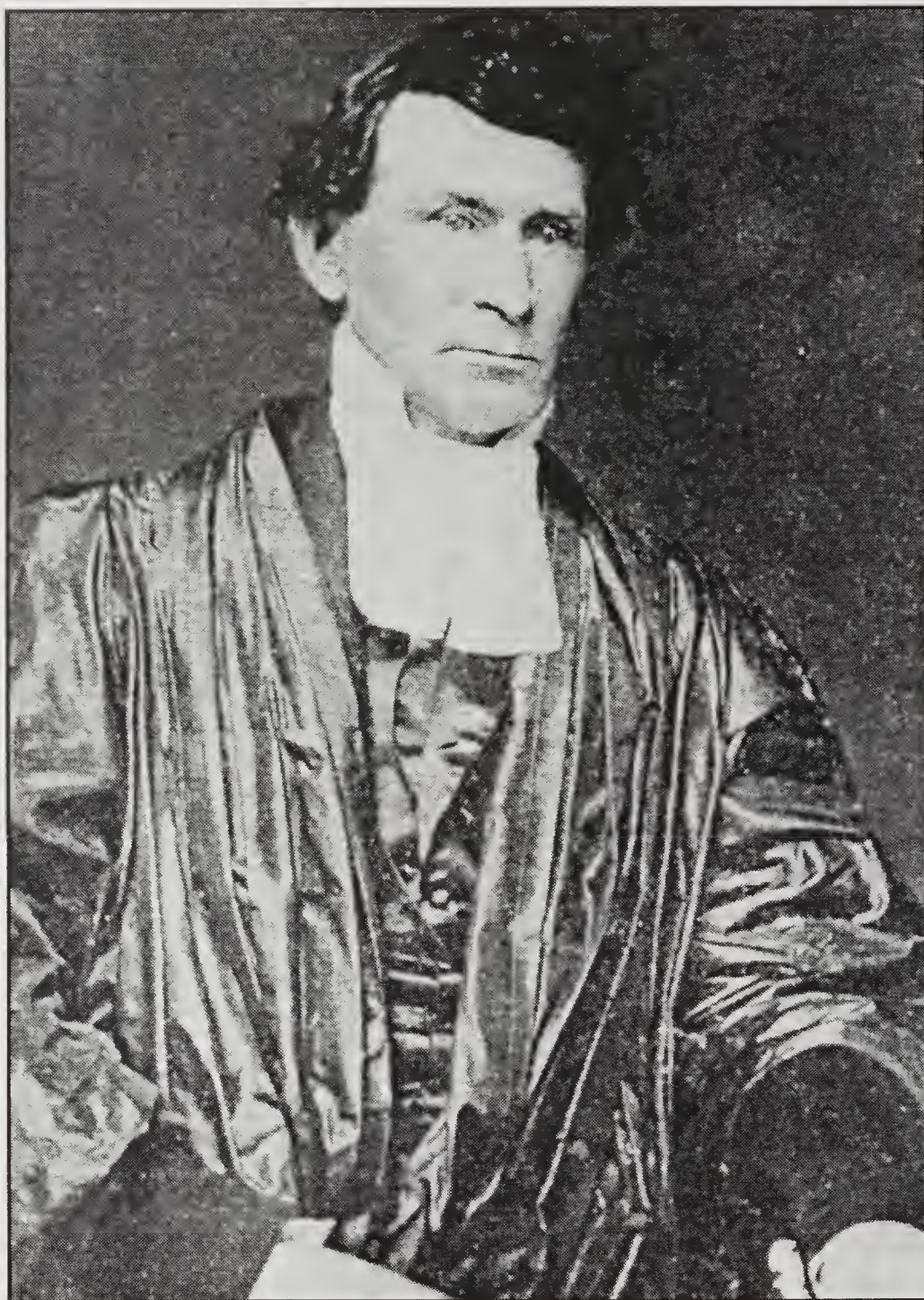
Almost as remarkable as the slave letters was the diary kept by Elizabeth O. Hill, a Wilmingtonian who left home for the relative

safety of Chapel Hill. She chronicled not only her interactions with the De Rosset family, but maintained a keen interest in the port city as she read newspapers, consulted with travelers, and corresponded with friends still in Wilmington. Her diary is full of angst and grieving generated by the war and the epidemic. She even recorded the panic in Chapel Hill when a slave traveling from Wilmington with yellow fever returned to his master in the college town and “Took to his bed & died.”²⁶ The death sparked the quick departure of some of students.

In late September, the newspaper warned “the fever must be very malignant in its character as we hear of no recoveries. One of the recent cases is a colored woman, the first we have yet heard of.”²⁷ British businessman William C. Corsan arrived in the Wilmington a few months after the fever abated. He magnified the paper’s conclusions. The Sheffield cutlery merchant recalled that among the dead were “many . . . negroes.”²⁸ Corsan’s remarks concerning African Americans indicated that the strain of the virus was particularly deadly, as it was common knowledge that blacks had some resistance to the fever.

Most scholars believe that slave ships carried the disease to the Americas from West Africa.²⁹ Centuries of coexistence may explain the Africans resistance to the disease. The high death toll among African Americans in Wilmington may have been due to so many being exposed to the full brunt of the fever. Slave owners fled and left many of their bondsmen to face the fever. At the close of the epidemic, the newspaper estimated that as many as 150 blacks may have died of the fever, and 111 were buried in the “colored cemetery.”³⁰ The paper, though, acknowledged that it did not monitor the funerals and deaths of African Americans as closely as whites.

There is strong evidence that not all of the enslaved African Americans felt Bella De Rosset’s sense of loyalty. On 8 October, the *Journal* listed a string of ads for runaway slaves, some of which imply the slaves used the fever to screen their respective escapes.³¹ Maria, belonging to Eliza Walker, may have hidden in town, as did a male slave named Alfred owned by the Wilmington & Manchester Railroad. Experienced drayman Jacob Hunt took his leave while employed hauling salt between the sound and the city. In addition, a young man named Dallas escaped from



his new owners immediately after he arrived in town via train. Along those same lines, Wragg concluded that “at least one-half” of the people in town during the panic “were negroes.”³²

Rev. Robert Brent Drane,
D.D., Rector of St. James
Episcopal Church,
Wilmington, North
Carolina

Immediately after the fever faded, the new commanding general, William Henry Chase Whiting, issued an eight-part order to restore military control of the town.³³ Four of these points were directed at limiting the movement of blacks. The directives required that all slaves visiting the town have written permission with a description of the bearer. Those African Americans caught loitering would be required to labor on the defensive entrenchments and all blacks were required to be in their quarters by 9:00 PM. Finally, livery stable keepers were restricted from leasing horses or conveyances to blacks under any pretense. This list of ordinances at the epidemic’s closure indicated that for a brief period the fever allowed slaves some freedom of movement and chance to escape.

As September advanced, the weather remained “persistently warm.”³⁴ The paper reported that, “although the progress of the fever is slow, and no means approaches the character of an epidemic, there is no improvement in the general health of the town, a fact which absentees ought to bear in mind, and not prematurely hasten their return.”³⁵ For those who remained in town, life in Wilmington was extremely unnerving. Tar barrels were ignited to disrupt the deadly miasma in the air thought to contain the essence of the fever poison. Elsewhere, thieves infiltrated stores searching for food or riches. By mid-October, the editors of the *Journal* bemoaned “the number of sick and helpless people in our town exceeds all calculation. Wilmington is one vast fever hospital.”³⁶

As panic-stricken civilians and soldiers spread, rumors mushroomed. Army deserters claimed that the fever had reached south to Fort Fisher, which forced Col. Lamb to issue an order to all absentees from the fort to “return on the expiration of the leaves and furloughs as usual, being careful to avoid passing through Wilmington.”³⁷ Stories also circulated that the epidemic had migrated to the general army hospital, a story denied by the hospital surgeon. Summing up the situation in a letter written early in the epidemic, townswomen Henrietta Urquhart wrote to Mary L. H. Foxhall, that “no sooner had this place began to recover from the excitement it was in with regard to the yankees than a second overtook us in the report that the yellow fever broke out in Town & I believe it was worse than the first, there is hardly a person left in place the seem to have a greater horror of it than they of the yankees.”³⁸

Urquhart stayed in the city even though her neighbors departed. Before her death from the fever, the sixty-four year old Urquhart communicated with other holdouts and gained strength from reports by Rev. Robert B. Drane of St. James Episcopal Church that many of those who fled were doing well. Along with medical professionals and elected politicians, citizens watched the actions of clergy members closely during a Southern yellow fever epidemic. The people of Wilmington were no exception. The *Journal's* remark that not all the churches could hold complete Thanksgiving service in October due to the absence of ecclesiastical leadership was indicative of keeping tabs on preachers.³⁹ Two ministers who remained to help the needy and fell to

yellow fever were Drane and Reverend John L. Prichard of the Front Street Baptist Church. Reverend Drane died in mid-October during the epidemic's apex. Diarist Elizabeth Hill recalled that Drane was a sincere friend, kind pastor, and was “now in the mansions of his heavenly father.”⁴⁰

As the weeks passed, fever crept closer to Prichard's own residence, and soon his sister and slaves fell ill. With “Death all around us,” the minister also contracted the fever.⁴¹ He drew his strength from his fellow clergyman Drane and felt a great loss when his colleague died. After Prichard's sister recovered from the disease, his sibling, an experienced nurse, and family slaves attended to the long-suffering minister. Prichard kept in touch by letter with his family that had left the city. In the early stages of the fever, Prichard wrote his wife, “I am sick now. My poor back and head ache, the true symptoms of the fever. This is my *bodily* condition. I have no other trust but the precious Redeemer and He is precious to me.”⁴² After battling the disease and its lingering effects for a month, Prichard died in mid-November.

No one felt the loss of Rev. Drane more than the reverend's son, Henry, who feared dying without his loved ones present to mourn his passing and provide him with last rites. Henry Drane moved his family first to his father's church's rectory and then to the country. He, however, returned to city, perhaps to oversee the burial of his father and Henrietta Urquhart. With so much confusion, many victims were buried in Oakdale Cemetery without any notion of ceremony. Religious leaders, such as Prichard, attended to the living and the dead all in the same trip, as Prichard combined visits to the sick while on the way to the cemetery to give last rites to the deceased.⁴³

Oakdale, located northeast of the town, was one of the few settings that remained active during the epidemic. Opened in 1816, it was Wilmington's first municipal cemetery. The paper regularly reported on the number of interments and clamored “coffins—coffins, [were] the great want.”⁴⁴ To meet the demand, coffins arrived from Charleston and Fayetteville. One observer recalled, “it is a sad sight indeed to see and hear dray loads of them daily going through the streets.”⁴⁵ Along with coffins, there was a possible shortage of coffin screws. The following

year, C. Augustus Hobart-Hampden, a blockade runner captain, learned that the fasteners were in great demand because of their ability to keep bodies secure in the coffins.⁴⁶ Alongside the number of deaths, the *Journal* tracked the flow of coffins that were dispatched from the Central Depot and other sources.⁴⁷

The paper used the burials as one method to track mortality statistics, although problems arose following the death of the secretary of the cemetery association and the superintendent of grounds.⁴⁸ William Henry [Thurber?], perhaps a slave belonging to the De Rosset family, bemoaned, “ef you walk tin the street et Look Like A sorrowful time all day long the hurs [hearse] is going.”⁴⁹ More than a Victorian ritual, common wisdom claimed that the bodies buried outside of town carried “with them the disease contracted” in town. This may explain why Wragg disapproved of the Campbell family’s wake-like celebration over the remains of seaman Mitchel of the *Kate*.⁵⁰ In that same vein, Henry Drane informed Mary Foxhall that he had made arrangements for the burial of Henrietta Urquhart. Upon a physician’s request, Drane buried Urquhart in his lot in the cemetery. The doctor may have encouraged this action to protect the living, not just as a final gesture of humanity to the deceased. Pressed to inhume remains quickly, nineteenth century public health concerns encouraged burial in a mass grave. With that concern in mind, some victims were buried without the benefit of clergy. Drane had the body of Urquhart “enclosed in a box so that they could be removed if necessary.”⁵¹ His choice of the word “box” indicates that simple, makeshift coffins may have been employed.

For the living, the alleged cures from yellow fever were as varied as the fish in the sea. The *Daily Journal* relayed many of these ideas from a plethora of sources. Tapping a Portuguese medical periodical, the *Journal* noted that residents living in homes lighted by gas escape the fever and “it is from direct rays of the sun in the day that the greatest danger exists—far greater than in the night air, although a different opinion seems to be abroad.”⁵² The Medical Purveyor of Charleston dispatched two barrels of medicated liquor, quinine, and a half a pound of opium. It was incorrectly assumed that quinine would benefit yellow fever victims, much like the bark extract helped

malaria patients. Doctors also administered opium to calm delirious or agitated patients.⁵³

The best advice found in the paper, however, came from an anonymous individual, who reportedly had nursed hundreds of yellow fever patients. “Medicine does little for the yellow fever. Nursing does much. Not fussing and disturbing a patient, but skillful care to do what is right, and to avoid what is wrong.”⁵⁴ For the survivors, medicine for the soul was found at Thanksgiving services when possible. The service at St. James Church, though, was not held because there were no musicians and very few parishioners.⁵⁵

Not content to be idle, civic-minded citizens formed a Sanitary Committee and Howard Association on 17 October. Inspired by the selfless example of John Howard, an English sanitation and prison reformer who gave his name to the movement, the association met regularly to coordinate their efforts at the Central Depot. Using the Howard Association of New Orleans as a model, they moved quickly to visit sufferers and distribute disaster relief supplies.⁵⁶

Dr. T. C. Worth’s contribution was as an example of the self-sacrificing nature of health care professionals. Worth served as the Vice President of the Howards before he became ill with the fever himself and died. On 27 October, the *Journal Office* announced that the doctor was at “last prostrated by the prevailing sickness.”⁵⁷ The Association issued a resolution acknowledging Worth’s ultimate sacrifice and “open-handed charity.”⁵⁸ The nurses, druggists, and doctors of Charleston also made heroic contributions. Mayor John Damson, a fever survivor, publicly recognized their contribution as caregivers and reserved special praise for the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy. The response by physicians at the fever’s apex was so positive that local coordinators asked that the mayor declare that “no more be sent or come on until further notice.”⁵⁹

The Sanitary Committee assumed certain temporary municipal authority. In addition, the Committee focused on gathering statistics from physicians, centralizing support, and assisting the nurses and doctors from Charleston. Members also distributed contributions of sweet potatoes, rice, chickens, apples, flour, hams, meal, beef, crackers, and even delicacies, as well as a few thousand dollars in cash. Much of the foodstuffs came from Charleston and Fayetteville.

Support also came from Raleigh, Montgomery, and Mobile. In addition, a fund-raiser was held in Richmond; the citizens of Wilmington also contributed to assist their neighbors. Also noteworthy were the contributions from North Carolina soldiers that served surrounding states. The Committee took unspecified "measures for the relief of sick and destitute." The Committee even went so far as to notify William B. Lipid that he must keep his drug store open, "otherwise steps will be taken to have it kept open by the authorities."⁶⁰

The townsfolk, furthermore, benefited from support from Confederate officials and officers. Confederate Passed Assistant Surgeon James W. B. Greenhow, on duty at Wilmington Station, attended to patients. Greenhow had served in the United States Navy and was curiously promoted to surgeon in the middle of epidemic.⁶¹ Captain Jonas P. Levy, whose experience with the fever dated back to the Mexican War, opened a public soup house on the southeast corner of Dock and Front streets. By the end of October, the kitchen fed two hundred people a meal of soup, bread, and meat. The cook in the galley polished his culinary skills to the point where the *Journal Office* dubbed the soup "good" tasting and a "great improvement on the first attempt."⁶² With success of the soup kitchen, there was discussion of opening a bakery even though there was a shortage of flour.

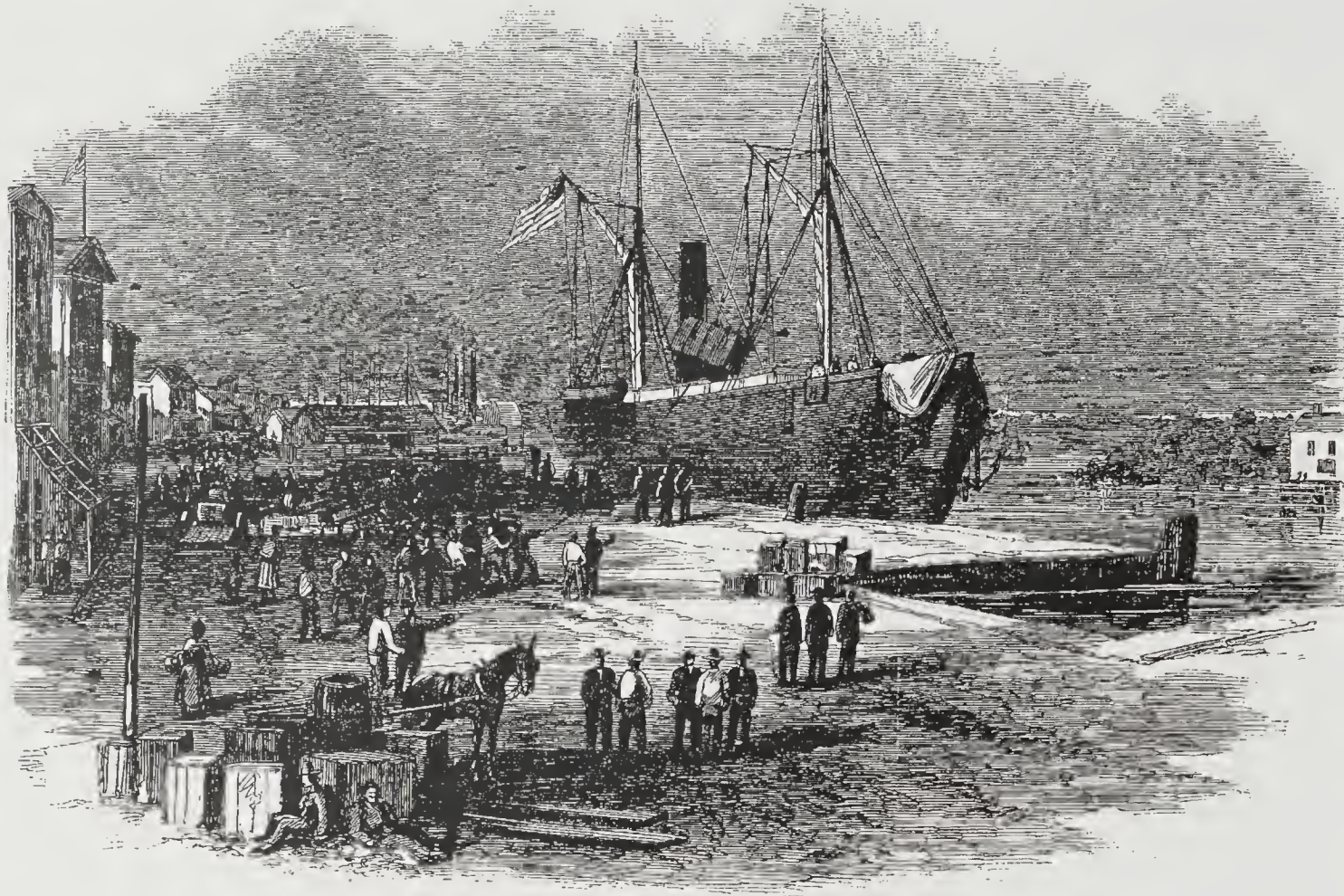
General P. G. T. Beauregard dispatched at least five surgeons under his command at Charleston to aid the fever effort.⁶³ The Louisiana native was particularly aware of the devastating effects of yellow jack, having spent many years in New Orleans and losing a sister to the dreaded disease. Following the Civil War, the general again showed his compassion for fever victims. He headed the Hood Memorial Association, whose objective was to publish as a fundraiser the memoirs of former Confederate General John B. Hood. In 1879, Hood, his wife, and daughter died of the fever, leaving behind a house full of orphans.⁶⁴

At the epidemic's height, ten to twenty people perished and more than sixty new cases appeared daily. The final numbers concerning the death toll vary greatly depending on the source. Thomas Taylor thought that 2,500 died out of a population of six thousand residents.⁶⁵ One of the first published monographs that mentioned the tragedy was Corsan's Confederate travel account,

in which he that out "of a population of ten thousand about one thousand died very soon."⁶⁶ On 17 November, the *Journal* gave three sets of numbers. There were 441 reported deaths as of 15 November, and 446 as of the date the paper was issued. However, the same paper projected a death toll at 654, based on burials, which did not include twenty-six burials from death "from other causes."⁶⁷ In addition, the paper's editors thought this number would rise as additional numbers were tallied. Wragg quoted the newspaper's figure of 446 deaths in his two-part article on the epidemic.⁶⁸ Finally, consideration should be given to Henry Drane's remark that "the deaths are not correctly reported in the paper."⁶⁹

Scholars have amassed lower figures apparently based on the newspaper's totals. Professor John Barrett placed the figure at five hundred, about ten percent of the population. Similarly, blockade chronicler Hamilton Cochran placed the death toll at 446 victims. Studies published after the works of Barrett and Cochran put the death toll higher. In his history of the port of Wilmington, Alan Watson concluded that there were 650 deaths, and fleeing survivors reduced the town to four thousand inhabitants. Likewise, historian Stephen R. Wise placed the death toll in and around Wilmington at more than seven hundred, about fifteen percent of the population. More importantly, all of the historians concluded that the epidemic was swift and devastating to the populace.⁷⁰

In the first week of November, the fever showed signs of waning. The interments and new cases slowly declined, frost appeared three times, and signs of commerce returned.⁷¹ The stockholders of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad set their annual meeting for mid-month. The parishioners of the Orange Street Baptist Church announced a Sunday service of Humiliation and Thanksgiving and invited all sects to attend. At the end of the month, the *Journal* proclaimed, "We had a splendid frost on Saturday and Sunday nights, and the atmosphere is really wholesome" and finally boasted, "Gen. Yellow Jack is no more—he has done all the mischief in his power, and has finally yielded to his fate."⁷² Still, as a precaution, authorities advised incoming residents that they should ventilate and fumigate their houses and thoroughly boil and cleanse all clothing because fever sufferers may have infected bedding.



Wilmington's recovery from the fever's grip came at a time when the city was becoming more important as a blockade runner's haven. In November, General Whiting was "assigned specially to the defense of the Cape Fear River."⁷³ Whiting's challenge was magnified by the epidemic. The general reported to the Confederate Secretary of War on the condition of the threatened town. Specifically, the general observed that the "danger of its reduction is more imminent from the disorders consequent of the pestilence which has desolated the unfortunate city. Preparations have been suspended, the garrison reduced and withdrawn, the workshops deserted, transportation rendered irregular and uncertain, provisions, forage, and supplies exhausted. Unless therefore more speedy measures for re-enforcement and relief be adopted I have great apprehensions of a successful coup de main on the part of the enemy."⁷⁴

Still, Whiting did not want everyone to return. Instead, speaking in third person, he warned that, "Considering the present condition of affairs, both as regards to the pestilence which has desolated the city and the threatening attitude of the enemy, he makes an earnest request to all citizens whose families are absent not to permit them for the present, to return home."⁷⁵ On the other hand, supervisors sent word that "all persons employed in our Ship-Yard before the

fever commenced are requested to return."⁷⁶ With more enemy attention on the port, and a shortage of food and firewood, the citizens of Wilmington were facing a rough winter.

Not only was Wilmington an ideal wartime port, but the environs offered rice, pine trees for naval stores and lumber, produce, livestock, and salt. The Cape Fear River could be navigated a hundred miles inland to Fayetteville. This bounty, however, made the region a potential target for Union forces and caused Whiting much worry. Whiting also observed that upwards of 300,000 bushels of an excellent rice crop at Cape Fear had been harvested, but not thrashed for various reasons.⁷⁷ The rice could be both food and forage, and he had concerns that the bounty might fall into the hands of the enemy. Therefore, he had to be prepared to destroy the grain.

The mysterious heavens with its telltale comet that appeared to herald the coming epidemic also provided a freak snow storm in early November that closed the plague. The Confederates and Wilmingtonians, however, did not allow the heavens to dictate their collective fates. Confronting the cause of the epidemic, local and Confederate officials took action to prevent future harm.⁷⁸ A quarantine station below the city on the Cape

The Port of Wilmington
(From *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*,
15 April 1865)

Fear checked the health status on blockade runners and their crews, especially ships arriving from Nassau in the spring and summer. Fever-free vessels earned a pratique, or a clean bill of health. This haunting shadow of the fever remained until the end of the war and was reflected in many directives. In September 1863, for instance, General Whiting ordered that "all vessels from Nassau will remain at quarantine until permission is given to come to the city."⁷⁹

Certainly men such as agent Taylor understood the danger of yellow jack. Operating in the Caribbean basin, the fever became one more risk taken by blockade runner crews. On one occasion, twenty-eight crew members on his ship contracted the disease out a compliment of thirty-two. Seven men died. He caught the disease himself and thought it affected his long-term health. Taylor steamed into Wilmington on a blockade runner three times and was quarantined twice. He, however, did not begrudge the officials in Wilmington. Given the ravaging effects of the epidemic, Taylor concluded that it was "No wonder the authorities were scared and imposed heavy penalties on us in the shape of quarantine."⁸⁰ A third time he was saved the tedious delay because the blockade runner *Banshee* also transported an Arabian horse as a gift for Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Rather than destroy the horse and keep the *Banshee* in quarantine, authorities in Richmond allowed the blockade runner to pass through the safety net. Taylor estimated that this ploy made the ship's owners an extra £20,000 to £30,000.⁸¹

During the spring of 1864, the stern quarantine message even reached shipping principals in London. In May, representative John T. Bourne informed his seniors at Lane, Hankey & Co. that the "season having so far advanced that the trade of the steamers to Wilmington being now expected to be principally to Bermuda instead of Nassau, in consequence of the prevalence there of fever during the summer months, which subjects them to quarantine at Wilmington after the 20th *idem*."⁸² In the summer and fall of 1864, blockade runners used Halifax, Nova Scotia as a base to reach Wilmington, rather than the Bahamas or Bermuda because of outbreaks of yellow fever.⁸³ The authorities in Wilmington were sure to place such vessels from the islands under extended quarantine. From the end of August to the beginning of December, ten successful trips into Wilmington began in Halifax.

At the quarantine station soldiers stopped all potentially threatening blockade runners. Moreover, soldiers at the station were not allowed to mingle with the civilian population in town. Nevertheless, a few cases of yellow fever surfaced in the fall, but the situation did not erupt into another epidemic. The presence of the quarantine remained in effect until the end of the war. A map in the *Illustrated London News* (18 February 1865) identified a large quarantine fort (Fort Anderson) on the east side of the Cape Fear River about nine miles north, northeast of Smithville.⁸⁴

As for the citizens of Wilmington scattered by the epidemic and war, many did not return. Some of the refugees had already contracted the fever and died in nearby communities. Others, such as Elizabeth Hill, made arrangements to sell her effects in the city "before the Yankees attack the place."⁸⁵ She concluded that "Our old Town's not what it used to be— & since the yellow fever has been there . . . I don't care to return." Still, the ordeal made her "sad to leave my native place."

The fortunes of war changed Wilmington from a secondary, coastal harbor to the most important seaport of the Confederacy, but not without a cost. The Four Horses of the Apocalypse, death, pestilence, war, and famine all visited in rapid succession. Pestilence struck first followed by death and food shortages in the isolated town. Finally, the red horse of war consumed at least 3,600 Union and Confederate casualties in final months of the battle when Union naval and army forces bombarded and stormed the forts protecting the city in the closing days of the war.

Yellow fever and other diseases left a lasting mark on the urban citizens of the South. Antebellum Wilmington was no different. Like many cities, outbreaks of smallpox and yellow fever in the premier North Carolina port touched the collective psyche. War or no war, steps were taken to keep the yellow jack in check. The yellow fever epidemic in New Bern of 1864 added fuel to this fire of fear. For Wilmington, this meant occasionally restricting the movement of vital supply ships from Caribbean islands during the warmer months. As for crew members of block runners and blockaders, they faced a deadlier risk in the unseen pathogen than the treacherous shoals off the Carolina coast.⁸⁶

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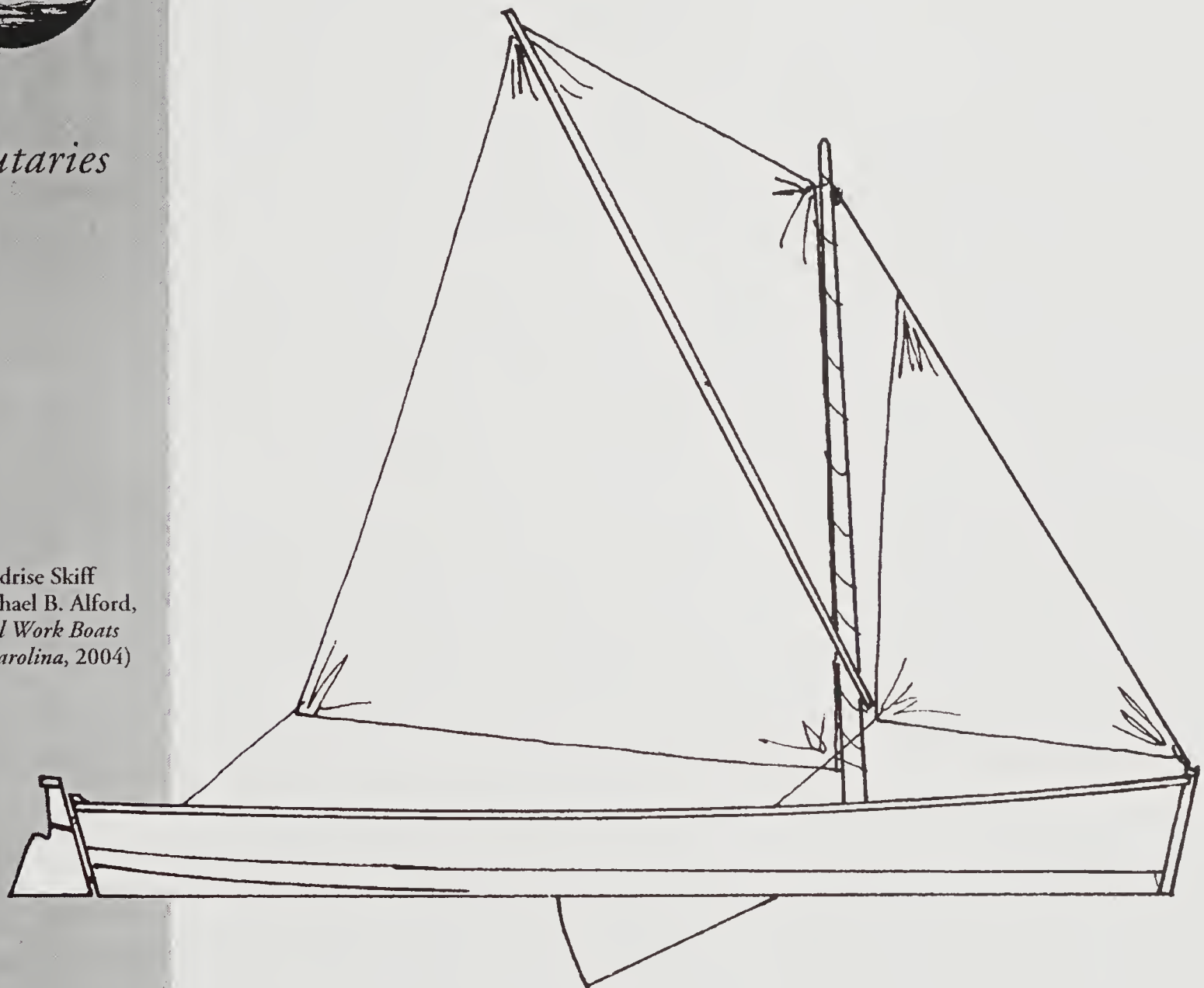
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Tributaries

North Carolina Deadrise Skiffs*

by Paul E. Fontenoy
North Carolina Maritime Museum



Right: Deadrise Skiff
(From Michael B. Alford,
*Traditional Work Boats
of North Carolina*, 2004)

The North Carolina deadrise skiff is a vernacular watercraft type whose range is essentially limited to the confines of Core and Bogue sounds and their surrounding waters. Despite its restricted native habitat, this skiff exhibits a number of distinctive features, in its construction, rig, and its social milieu, that makes its study a worthwhile undertaking. Furthermore, this is a traditional boat that is still being built today using the same

methods and materials as were employed early in this century, not as an antiquarian exercise in nostalgia nor as part of a program to educate modern materialists in traditional mores, but because it still admirably suits its present owner's or builder's purpose.

Before proceeding further I must enter a caveat; a caveat, however, that should not be a cause for gloom, but rather should be the

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subject of celebration. One of the joys of our profession, researching small craft, is that every project is a work in progress. If ever we think we have completed our work on a vessel type and can pronounce categorically on all its aspects, we also can guarantee that our unwitting arrogant ignorance will catch up with us in the imminent future. These remarks, then, are a work in progress, but at least I am well aware of my ignorance.

I will begin with the simplest part of the research project—a description of the type. The North Carolina deadrise skiff is a shallow V-bottom open centerboard boat with modest flare and sheer and a very shallow draft. It has a slightly raking straight stem, a flat raking transom, modest rocker aft, and a deadwood to produce a straight keel line. It is rigged as a sloop with mainsail, topsail, and a jib set flying. Most boats are about twenty-one-feet long, five-foot, eight-inches in beam, and about twenty-four inches deep at the mast step. Local legend has it that a boat less than twenty-one-feet long was exempt from state registration and that this governed their size, but I have yet to verify this rumor.

So far, we all would probably agree, there is not much that could be regarded as particularly unusual about the type; it is not very different from dozens of other skiffs all around the North American coast or on the continent's rivers. A closer examination, however, soon starts to reveal the type's peculiarities. First of all, there is its rig—a rig that fairly shrieks *North Carolina* to any observant mariner. This highly distinctive development of the sprit rig, to my knowledge used nowhere else, spread throughout the sounds of the state during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The relatively short sturdy unstayed mast supported a large sail, shaped much like a normal gaff sail, supported by a sprit. A snotter held the foot of the sprit to the mast and, usually, vang controlled its peak. A halyard running through a dumb sheave cut into the masthead hoisted

the sail. North Carolina watermen usually used double sheets on the mainsail, and ran each side through what looked like a pin rail, except that it carried no pins. The jib was set flying from the stem head, and it too had double sheets running through fairleads on a thwart. The jib halyard, in early iterations of this rig, ran through a strop hanging from the masthead, but later the rig's one block appeared for this purpose. Finally, there was a topsail set from a very long topmast, whose foot was barely above the lower mast's partners. Early vessels used a rope collar to hold the topmast to the lower masthead, however, later boats had a spectacle iron. The foot of the topmast was always lashed to the lower mast, very often with a spanish windlass arrangement to tighten the seizing. The topsail itself was triangular and required no halyard. It used a sprit to spread its foot and was laced to both the mast and its sprit. Brails permitted the crew to furl the topsail rapidly.

As mentioned previously, while this rig was unique to North Carolina, it was not employed solely on the deadrise skiffs. This sprit topsail rig could be seen on flat-bottom skiffs and a variety of round-bottom and deadrise shad boats, as well as the subject of this study. It was very well adapted to conditions on the sounds and to the various vessel types' use. The large spritsail gave plenty of power for normal conditions in a sail that could be furled rapidly and would leave working space in the boat completely unobstructed, unlike a more normal fore-and-aft sail with its boom and gaff. In addition to supplementing the basic rig under appropriate conditions, the topsail provided motive power when the main was masked by land or trees while sailing in confined waters. The rig's design also permitted operation under topsail alone while working with the main furled. The topmast, however, could be quite a handful to handle in a breeze and usually needed two men to set it; there are stories that the customary mode of unshipping it in a strong wind was to throw it overboard and then bring the mast and sail into the boat.

While the deadrise skiff's rig, although unusual, is common to a range of small craft in North Carolina, two other aspects of this vessel type make it unique. The first is its construction. Initial observation of the boats themselves and their builders' practices would seem to suggest that this is but another slight variation on "skiff-built" watercraft, in which the side planking is bent around between transom and stem post, the bottom planking laid, and the entire vessel then turned over to be fitted out. I suggest, instead, that not only is the building process more than just a variation on skiff construction, but also that it provides valuable clues to the origins and possible evolution of the type.

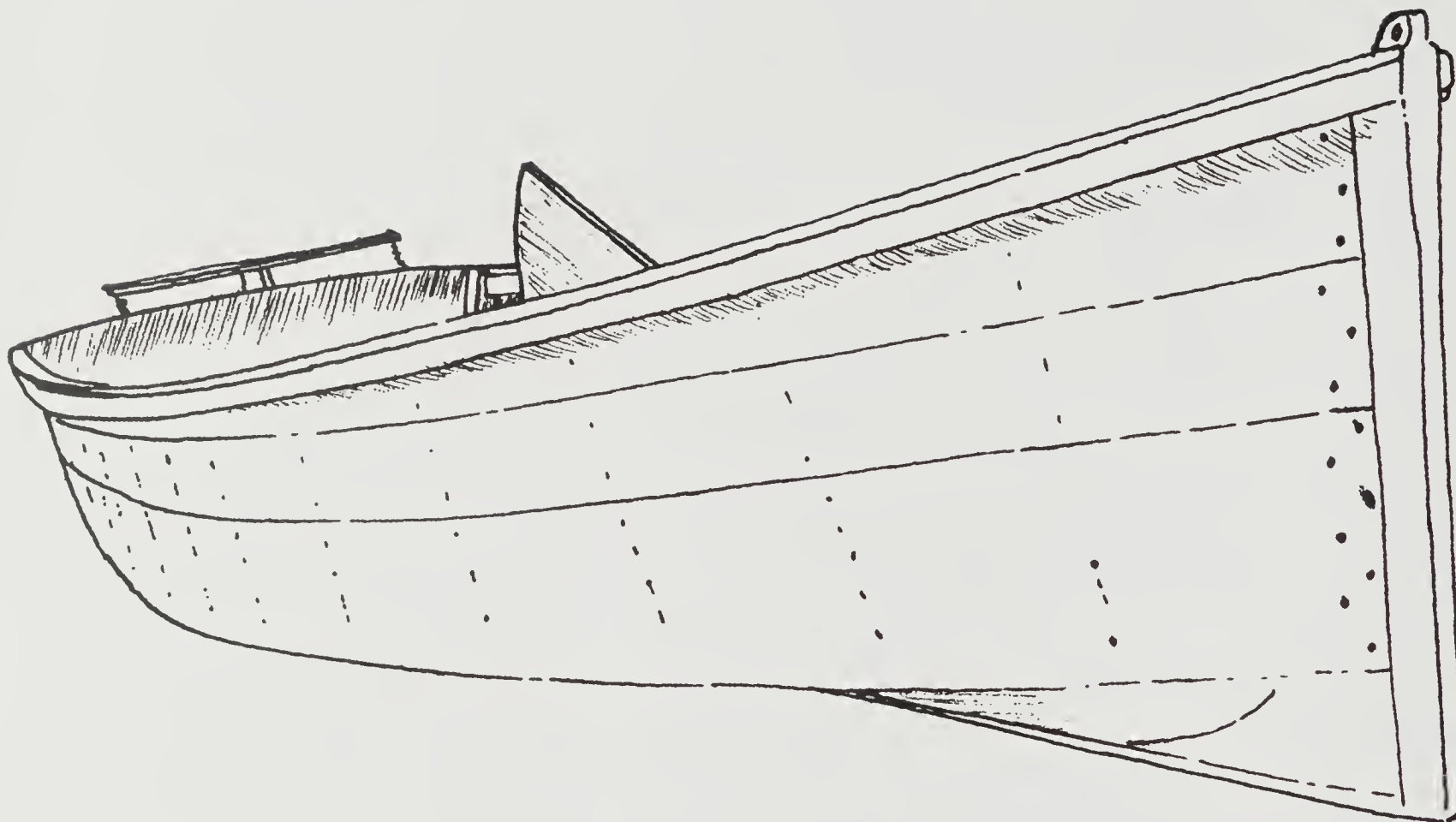
In 1987 and 1988, Rodney Barfield and Mike Alford of the North Carolina Maritime Museum extensively documented the process by which a local builder constructed one of these skiffs. Julian Guthrie of Harkers Island built his first boat in 1930 when he was twelve years old for his uncle, "just to see if I could do it." He built over one hundred boats at his Hi-Tide Boat Works in Williston, ranging from eight-foot skiffs to eighty-four-foot work boats between 1950 and 1985, and continued to construct skiffs after retiring. He learned his trade from his grandfather and uncle, both boatbuilders, and, while some details of his methods changed over the years, it is clear that the essential process was unchanged from those of earlier generations.

The builder started construction by defining the overall length and the beam at transom and amidships. He then bent the two lowest side planks around and adjusted the plan of the boat until it "looked right," using temporary cross pieces to spread the sides. Only after establishing the basic outline of the boat did he actually shape the lower edge of the side planks to the desired rise at bow and stern, set the rake of the transom and stem, and flare the sides. He then inserted the boat's heavy floor timbers, usually cut from one and one-half-inch to two-inch stock,

spaced at about eighteen-inch intervals, and shaped to give the appropriate deadrise (the deadrise was very shallow and the lines of keel and chine were parallel except at the extreme bow). At this point, he also fitted the lowest plank of the transom. All these components were faired as they were inserted using long battens.

Planking the bottom came next. This ran longitudinally and was fastened to the floors only—there were no fasteners joining bottom and side planking. The bottom planking stopped about two feet short of the stem, which also terminated at the lower edge of the side plank. The forefoot itself was a "chunk," locally termed the "logging," and the bottom planking fitted into a rabbet on its after face. The logging was a single piece on the earliest boats, gouged out on the inside like a sugar scoop and shaped externally to match the lines of the boat. Later vessels had logging built up from plank stock using a variety of methods. Most common was two-inch-by-six-inch stock on edge running fore and aft, but other variations exist, including one boat that has a three-fourth-inch layer running athwartships followed by a fore and aft layer with planks on edge below.

At this point, before the sides had been planked, the boat was righted. The builder then inserted side frames at every floor which he bolted in place. Most boats had frames with short knees at their feet, but some builders preferred long knees reaching well into the bottom. Some very late boats have no knees at all at their feet, relying instead on a simple lap joint. Only after all framing had been completed did the builder finish planking the sides, after which he fitted out the interior of the boat. Bottom and side planking was Atlantic White Cedar, known locally as juniper, three-fourth-inch thick and usually five-inches to seven-inches wide. Some builders, however, preferred much wider stock; an example in the North Carolina Maritime Museum's collection,



built by Gib Willis at Morehead City in 1948, has thirteen-inch wide boards on its bottom and eleven-inch wide planking on its sides. Frames and floors were usually hard yellow pine, and this was also used for stems and sometimes for transoms. Very few boats had side decks of any kind—the owners liked simply to turn their boats on their sides to wash them out and decks would have prevented the egress of water.

These vessels, you will note, have no keel members of any description nor any chine logs or other longitudinal strengtheners other than a one-inch-by-three-fourth-inch rub rail. Longitudinal strength derives entirely from the integrity of the skin structure and the angle between the bottom and sides which forms a girder. Transverse strength comes from their heavy frame structure.

Those who analyze and classify watercraft fall into two categories. There are those who use form or shape as a classification tool,

exemplified by Howard Chapelle and epitomized in his *American Small Sailing Craft*. Then there are those who rely upon structural features for classification. Probably the most important exponent of this paradigm is Basil Greenhill with his *Archaeology of the Boat*, now available in a completely rewritten form as *The Archaeology of Boats and Ships*.

I would argue that the greatest disservice Chapelle did the maritime research community was not, as the late W.P.B. Dunne averred, his contempt for scholarly apparatus and, to be kind, his cavalier reconstruction of material, but rather his advocacy of form as a classification tool—an advocacy so successful that fascination with form has become a pernicious influence in watercraft analysis. After all, does the fact that an Indonesian *lambo prahu* bears a remarkable resemblance to a European cutter indicate that the two types share some common ancestry? Or, to move closer to home, does the fact that a North Carolina skipjack looks like a Chesapeake

Deadrise Boat
(From Michael B. Alford,
*Traditional Work Boats of
North Carolina*, 2004)

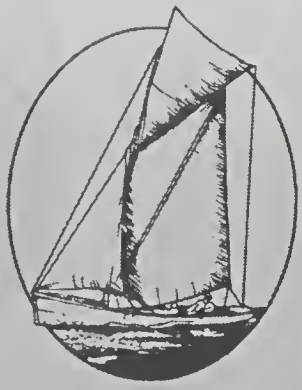
Bay bateau mean that one is a development of the other? In each case, a more careful study of construction features reveals that the builders of both the *lambo prahu* and the North Carolina skipjack saw an alien prototype, admired its behavior, and used their own existing construction techniques to build copies of these originals in the hope of emulating their performances. Form, I venture to suggest, may be more revealing of influences than of ancestries.

Similarly, I would argue that, while the North Carolina deadrise skiff looks like a skiff, and is even called a skiff, its construction indicates that it owes little to skiffs for its ancestry. Its structure has far more in common with flats and scows, which too rely on girder structures for longitudinal strength and heavy cross frames for transverse rigidity. This link is reinforced by the skiff's constructional sequence which duplicates that of flats—build the bottom, raise the sides. We do not, at present, know the origins and derivation of this interesting type, but I think we will be well advised to look to flat or scow development in North Carolina for our answers.

The second unusual feature of North Carolina deadrise skiffs is their use. When they appeared in the late nineteenth century, they were work boats used for fishing and transportation on Core and Bogue sounds. This employment continued into the 1920s and early 1930s when small motor-driven skiffs replaced them. Nevertheless, skiffs continued to be built and operated by watermen for recreational purposes because a tradition of watermen's regattas had become established in earlier years. This tradition continued into the 1950s and early 1960s as the watermen continued to have this work boat type built for the sole purpose of recreation. Many traditional boats have continued to be built for recreational purposes—Friendship sloops, dories of various types, Cape Cod catboats, the list is endless—but there is an

important distinction I wish to make. The catboats, Friendships, etc., have all been built for “yachties,” non-traditional mariners whose only connection with the water is recreational. North Carolina deadrise skiffs, until very recently, have continued to be built for watermen who made their livings using other types, but wanted a vessel that was already “theirs” for their own recreational use. This may not be unique, but it is certainly very unusual and represents an intriguing social and cultural aspect of maritime society in North Carolina.

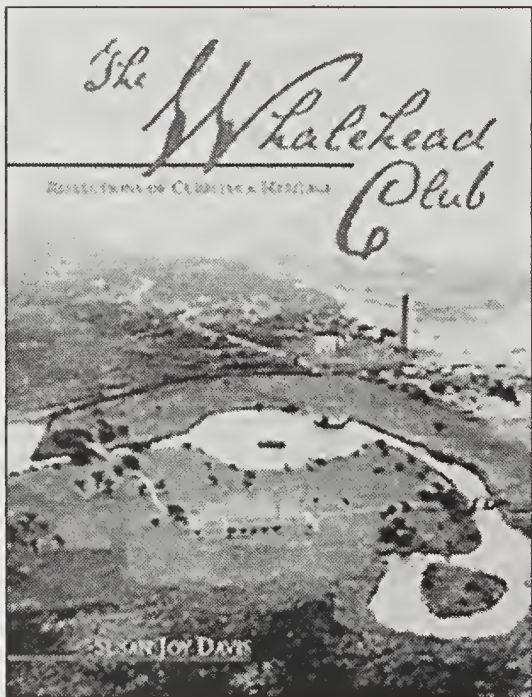
The study of this interesting vessel is very much a work in progress. We have been able to document a dozen or so examples ranging in date from 1910 to 1987 and constructed by four named builders and others who remain anonymous. Folk tales abound about the type's myriad supposed inventors and its origins, but most are clearly improbable. Nevertheless, this is a worthwhile project to pursue, not only for what it may tell us about the development of distinctively North Carolinian watercraft, but also what it may reveal about the society that produced them.



Tributaries

Books

Reviews of Select Titles



Susan Joy Davis. *The Whalehead Club: Reflections on Currituck Heritage*. The Donning Company Publishers: Virginia Beach, Virginia, 2004. 160 pp. with index.

reviewed by Kent Priestley
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It's an oft-repeated tale on the North Carolina coast, beginning centuries ago and likely to continue well into the future: rich Northerner longs for peace and repose in Nature, finds the ideal retreat along the North Carolina coast, and builds a needlessly large residence upon it.

In 1923 it was Edward Collings Knight Jr., a Philadelphian and heir to a considerable fortune in both the sugar and railroad car trades. As a seasonal counterpoint to life up North, Knight (b. 1863) and his second wife, Marie Louise, chose a spot of land near the Currituck Beach Light House to build a 21,000 square foot house. They called it "Corolla Island." Only in 1940, four years after Knights' death, did it assume its current name of "Whalehead Club."

In her new book, Susan Joy Davis turns her attention on the Knights' mansion, which stands today as Currituck County's most architecturally engaging, and, after the 1875 Currituck Beach lighthouse, most famous landmark.

Decades before the Knights arrived at Corolla, there was an established tradition of Northern seasonal flight to the Currituck banks. Beginning shortly after the Civil War, barons of industry seeking to get out from under their Gilded Age concerns came to the region during the winter months, long enough to enjoy the restorative qualities of her sea and sound and loose a few rounds at her clouds of migratory waterfowl.

The region's one-time natural abundance seems inconceivable by today's diminished standards. Before market hunting, habitat loss, and later, drought, took their toll, the beds of underwater vegetation in freshwater Currituck Sound supported a dense, unmatched stock of ducks, swans, and geese during the winter. Sportsmen learned of this natural wealth from the pages of journals such as *Harper's Illustrated* and *The New York Times*, and began arriving from northern cities by the hundreds in the coldest months to lodge at the hunt clubs that were rising along the sound shores. Once there (and, as Davis points out, getting there was never easy), they enjoyed successful mornings in the duck blinds, meals of local cuisine, and evenings of cigars and spirits, well out of the banks' notorious cold and damp.

What is perhaps most remarkable about Knight's grand retreat is the variety of uses it took on over the years, from private retreat to hunting club, Coast Guard installation to boys' academy, and, most improbably, centerpiece of a rocket lab during the Space Race of the 1960s. Davis' book ends with a neglected Whalehead Club being purchased, in 1992, by Currituck County, stopping short of the recently completed restoration.

While Davis makes the club her book's centerpiece, she takes a much grander look at regional history, beginning with descriptions of English exploration, leading through the Revolutionary and Civil wars, famous shipwrecks, the hunting club tradition of the late

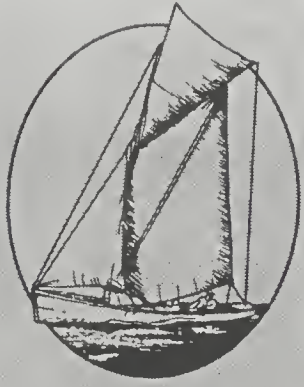
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the birth of the conservation movement, the World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War, and the boom times of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Whalehead Club is beautifully produced and edited, with a store of black and white images placed thoughtfully beside the text, and period maps orienting the reader to the time periods described. Though the history illuminated within is wide-ranging, Davis never loses sight of the importance of place and, especially, the accommodations by Currituck residents over the years to those visiting their native shores.

If there is fault to be found with *The Whalehead Club*, it is Davis' willingness to adopt the same epic, overwrought tone that too many authors use when describing the Outer Banks. Her tale is told in superlatives, ultimately doing the reader, and perhaps the history itself, a minor disservice. While Davis' fondness for her subject is warranted, her high-toned descriptions leave one wondering whether it may have stripped her of a certain amount of scholarly detachment.

There also are a few dubious claims in the book. No doubt the reader familiar with the tame, gridded sands north of Duck will raise an eyebrow at Davis' assertion, near the end of the book, that 1980s development on the Currituck banks "proceeded with a conscious effort to balance, protect, and uphold Nature's art."

Yet these are minor quibbles, and do not discount the overall value of Davis' effort. Much of *Whalehead Club* is satisfyingly written, and the author's ambitious, loving portrait of a highly visible but little-known landmark adds considerably to the growing genre of Outer Banks literature.



Tributaries

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