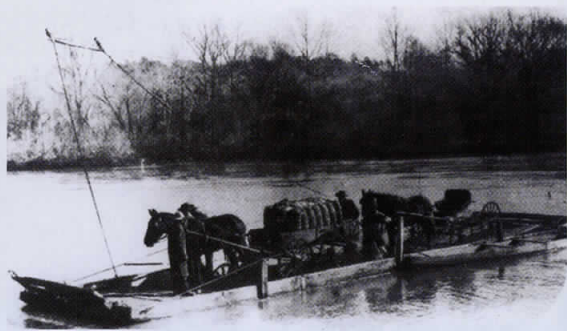


# EARLY FERRY CROSSINGS and FORMATIONS

A quick glance at a road map for eastern North Carolina and nothing seems too out of the ordinary. Take a closer look though and examine the map a little more, especially the water bodies, there are a lot of them so take your time. You start to notice stretches of dotted lines across the coastal rivers and sounds. Now look at the legend and you'll see that these broken lines depict the ferry boat crossings of Carolina country connecting communities that are separated by wide rivers and vast inland bays. Highways on the water traversed by the "Tar Heel Navy" not only keep the traffic moving but allow essential emergency access or evacuation possible in these hard to get to places. With the current event of a new bridge coming to town it is interesting to take a look back at some of North Carolina's ferry routes, old and new, because before there were bridges there were boats.

Most ferry operations in the North Carolina started as private enterprises but



eventually were turned over to the state. Some date back to the late 1700s, well before the automobile. The basic form has remained somewhat the same, they just got bigger to accommodate bigger loads. A flat barge with a slightly upturned bow, maybe a railing on the sides and a little extra free board for boats operating in areas susceptible to rough seas. Some of the early crossings farther upstream on coastal rivers were operated by pulling the craft along the shore against the flow of water then letting the current take it away while using oars to steer it across to the other side. Eventually these river crossings were set up with cables where the boat could be pulled straight across. Later ferries that operated along the sounds and inlets of the coast had the advantage of motor power to help push the load against wind, tide and waves. As more and more vehicle traffic arrived to the coast the necessity of automobile ferries was quite obvious. Some of the old routes were deemed worthy of replacing the voyage with a more reliable and quicker means of crossing, a bridge. Not quite as adventurous but if the money was available and enough support garnered it would be the way of the future. Old ferry landings were left to decay, succumb to erosion from the water or be overgrown by vegetation. Hardly noticeable to the driver or passengers of the zipping cars. Whether you consider it unfortunate or enjoy the slower pace, some watery routes still require the use of a ferry, today the North Carolina Department of Transportation operates a modest fleet of large Sound Class ferries, the slightly smaller Hatteras Class and River Class vessels as well as three cable ferries on the Cape Fear, Cashie and Meherrin Rivers. Transporting nearly 900,000 vehicles and two million passengers a year, North Carolina operates the second largest state-run ferry system in the Nation.

This coming fall the Museum will be holding a free presentation on some of the early ferry crossings and formation of the coastal ferry operations in North Carolina. The program is scheduled for November 3, 2016 at 12 pm.

Thanks to Ben Wunderly, NC Maritime Museum.