

THE MARITIMES



THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME MUSEUMS

HATTERAS • BEAUFORT • SOUTHPORT

WINTER 2023/SPRING 2024



Mending shrimp nets at Southport, circa 1940.
*Photo from the Charles A. Farrell Collection,
State Archives.*

www.ncmaritimemuseums.com

NORTH CAROLINA
**MARITIME
MUSEUMS**
BEAUFORT HATTERAS SOUTHPORT

Editor:
Ben Wunderly

Associate Editor:
Christine Brin

Design:
Stephanie Davis



NORTH CAROLINA
MARITIME MUSEUMS
BEAUFORT HATTERAS SOUTHPORT

Museums Director:
Joseph K. Schwarzer, II
Public Relations Coordinator:
Cyndi Brown
cyndi.brown@dncr.nc.gov

HATTERAS
(252) 986-0720

Administrative Assistant:
Tara Aaron

Friends President:
Danny Couch

BEAUFORT
(252) 504-7740

Site Manager:
Mike Peters

Friends President:
Bruce Prager

SOUTHPORT
(910) 477-5150

Museum Manager:
John Moseley

Friends Chairman:
Tom Hale

*One historic coast.
Three unique museums.*



©2023/2024 North Carolina Maritime Museums

Artifact Spotlight: Nevada Belt Buckle

By Tessa Johnstone and Michelle Crepeau

This military belt buckle, featuring the insignia of the Mexican government, was recovered from the wreck of the steamer *Nevada*, which lies seven miles off Cape Hatteras. *Nevada* was caught in a heavy swell and foundered on Diamond Shoals on June 4, 1868, before sinking two days later. As a cargo steamer, the vessel was traveling with goods and passengers from New York City to Vera Cruz, Mexico, via Havana, Cuba. The belt buckle—along with pistol grips, trigger guards, and many pieces of ammunition—was found in the debris of the wreck site; but there was no military related material listed on the ship's manifest. Why would potential undocumented war materials be aboard an American ship heading to Mexico? The likely answer is that the Ten Years' War, in which Cuba fought for independence from Spain, would begin a few months later, in the fall of 1868. Mexico supported the Cuban cause to decrease European colonial power in the Caribbean. The city of Vera Cruz, *Nevada's* intended destination, was a center for promoting the cause. There is potential that these recovered items could have been part of a smuggling operation by the Mexican government to bolster Cuban forces prior to the beginning of their fight for independence. There may have been a direct link from the United States to the revolution in Cuba as well, since many exiled Cubans in the country pledged their support for independence of their island home. Organizers in Cuba even hoped to be annexed by the United States.

An artifact in the collection at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum, the belt buckle recently underwent conservation for stabilization prior to being put on exhibit. The surface of the belt buckle was carefully cleaned under magnification using small hand tools, such as scalpels and eraser tips, revealing details (e.g., the eagle head and snake details of the medallion) previously hidden under dirt, corrosion, and marine accretions. The surface of the artifact was treated with a benzotriazole solution and coated with an acrylic resin to retard renewed corrosion caused by marine salt contamination and fluctuating humidity. Although the two halves of the belt buckle look like different metals, portable X-Ray fluorescence analysis carried out by the North Carolina Museum of Art revealed that the entire buckle is composed of brass. The difference in surface color could be due to a variety of reasons, including intentional patination choices by the manufacturer, slight differences in the metallurgical composition of the two halves, and/or differences in burial environment and exposure leading to different corrosion rates and products.

Tessa Johnstone is the collections manager and Michelle Crepeau is the conservator for the North Carolina Maritime Museums.



The artifact before (top) and after (bottom) treatment.

LOSS OF THE STEAMSHIP NEVADA.

The Nevada Sunk Off Cape Hatteras—One Seaman Lost Overboard—The Vessel and Cargo a Total Loss.

A telegraphic despatch, dated at Newbern, N. C., yesterday, announces the arrival at that port of the steamer Ellen S. Terry, with intelligence of the loss of the steamship Nevada, from New York for Vera Cruz and Sisal, via Havana. The vessel ran on Diamond Reef, seven miles south of Cape Hatteras, during the thick weather on Friday, June 5, and on the following day floated off and sunk in twelve fathoms of water, a light northwest wind prevailing at the time. The passengers were all saved, as were also the officers and crew, with the exception of one seaman who was lost overboard in an attempt to get out an anchor. The passengers lost almost all their baggage, and the vessel and cargo will be a total loss. Two of the rescued lady passengers, it was also stated, had gone to Norfolk in a steamer which had rendered assistance, and the remainder of the survivors were expected at Newbern last night.

New York Herald, June 10, 1868.

From The Friends

HATTERAS: Weather Impact Remains An Island Constant

Our mission at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum is to engage our visitors in the maritime history and shipwrecks of the Outer Banks. In doing so, the most common question is, "Why did this happen?" The answer almost always involves the weather. The National Weather Service at Hatteras has produced several meteorology pioneers. One such self-taught expert was Sam Doshier, the weather observer here from 1898 to 1905. He was a Smithville (Southport), North Carolina, native and attorney by trade who took the job thanks to a love of science from childhood. Hatteras did not disappoint. He was a meticulous note-taker and wrote with dramatic flair, as evidenced by his hurricane report in August 1899 concerning the San Ciriaco storm thrashing the island. It was picked up by the Associated Press wire and went out nationwide: "*The scene here on the 17th was wild and terrifying in the extreme...*" Doshier wrote, "*and language is inadequate to express the conditions that prevailed. The howling wind, roaring surf and rushing tide which swept over the land thundered like a thousand pieces of artillery, the like of which Dante's Inferno could scarcely equal.*"

That experience in what Outer Banks historian David Stick described as one of the most destructive storms to ever ravage the western Atlantic inspired Doshier to seek what determines the intensity of tropical systems. Thanks to his diligent efforts, we know much about the interaction with the Gulf, which forms what he coined as the "Hatteras Low." Today meteorologists refer to this interaction as the "nor'easter" so commonly referred to in New England.

The Friends of the Museum, the staff and our volunteers look forward to the completion of the museum's installation of all-new exhibits early in 2024. We'll see you then!

Danny Couch
Chairman

Friends of the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum ■

BEAUFORT: Friends' Role is to Support Museum

I'm often asked, "What exactly do the Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Beaufort do?" And "What are the benefits of joining?" Simply, the Friends support the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort. More specifically, here are a few ways we help.

We raise money that helps the museum purchase items both practical and important: a new van for educational programs and collections work; a new truck for transporting exhibits and boats; video monitors and touch screens for exhibits; artifacts (a circa 1670 sword like one found at the *Queen Anne's Revenge* wreck site, a blunderbuss from the same time period); and most recently, a replica working cannon to be mounted on the front patio. We have helped fund temporary research personnel and have established a Future Exhibits Fund.

The Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum also organizes and supports several boating programs: the Beaufort Oars, the Traditional Small Craft Association, High School Sailing, Sliding Seats Rowing Club, Adult Sailing, and our signature Junior Sailing Program.

The Friends also operates the Port of Call Museum Store. The store provides an enjoyable shopping experience for visitors and residents alike; souvenirs, gifts, books, and artwork are all available. Some of the proceeds of the store benefit the museum by supporting operational needs.

So, how does your membership benefit you? Significantly! You have pride of knowing your membership supports all these worthwhile activities. And, as a direct benefit to you, members receive a 10% discount on purchases at the museum store, a discount on registration fees for many museum programs and on enrollment for Junior Sailing, priority access to Junior Sailing registration, access to tickets for some of our most popular member-only events like the Crab Cake Cook-Off and Clam Chowder Cook-Off, and at higher membership levels, free admission to some events. If you currently aren't a member, please join at maritimefriends.org.

Bruce J. Prager

President

Friends of the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort ■

SOUTHPORT: Greetings from Cape Fear!

The new crew that came on board in late 2022 continues working very hard in changing course (just a bit!) and getting up to speed. And that work is clearly paying off: This year's visitation has increased 12 percent thus far in comparison to 2022. Museum staff have reached out to area schools and are welcoming new groups during the traditional school visitation season. Finally, they have finished up (with the great help from North Carolina Maritime Museums' system-wide staff based in Beaufort) a new commercial fishing exhibit that opened this fall.

Throughout, the Friends and volunteers have been actively involved in supporting the museum. Speaking for the Friends, we are excited for the future of the museum and look forward to continuing our support of the museum—whether it be funding new exhibits, helping teach during the school year, participating in special events, or assisting in daily operations. Please know that the museum is ready for your visit!

If you haven't checked out our Friends website in a while, please go to friendsncmmsouthport.com. Consider joining or renewing your membership with the Friends of the Museum online! Thank you for your continued interest in preserving and sharing our maritime history—in Southport and throughout North Carolina and our nation.

Come see us in Southport, and of course, fair winds!

Tom Hale

Chairman

Friends of the NC Maritime Museum at Southport ■

North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort

The North Carolina State Boat and Its Creator

By David Bennett

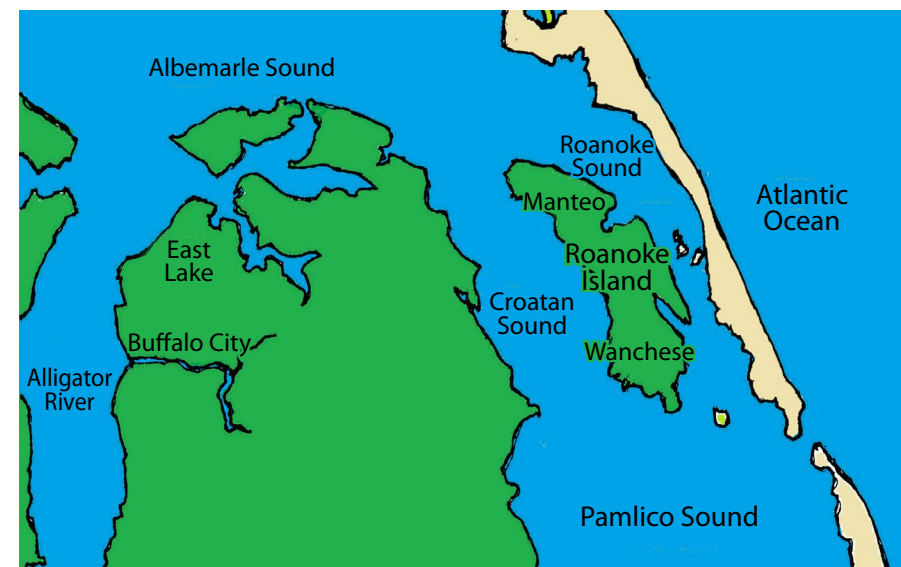


George Washington Creef at his boatyard on Roanoke Island with a pair of shad boats under construction. Photo from the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

The North Carolina shad boat, also known as the Albemarle Sound boat, is a watercraft so unique to North Carolina, it is North Carolina's official state boat. The shad boat design is believed to have grown out of the log boat tradition. Since the Colonial period, large cypress and juniper logs were shaped into boats. Some were single dugout log canoes while others were multi-log canoe-boats, commonly referred to as kunners and periaugers. By the mid-19th century, generations of logging had made large cypress and juniper logs scarce, forcing boatbuilders to turn to plank-on-frame construction. The classic shad boat is an open boat that ranges from 18 to 30 feet long. The carvel-planked, round-bottomed boat has a heart-shaped transom and is rigged with a spritsail. The name "shad boat" comes from the fact that the boat was primarily used to fish gill-nets and pound nets for American shad in the sounds of northeastern North Carolina. The design was pioneered in the 1870s by George Washington Creef of Roanoke Island.

Creef and other boat builders retained some of the log boat tradition in the construction of shad boats. This is reflected in the design and construction of the shad boat's keel. Like log boats, the shad boat's keel was hewn from a single juniper log. A "Y" shape was carved into the keel where it attached to the hull. This allowed the boat's bottom planks to smoothly align with the keel. The use of this technique is not surprising as Creef built log boats prior to developing the shad boat.

George Washington Creef was born in 1829 at East Lake on Dare County's mainland. It is unclear when Creef moved to Roanoke Island, but he was living there by the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War. When Creef first settled on Roanoke Island, he lived on the island's north end but later relocated to Wanchese on the island's southern end. According to folklore, Creef built his first shad boat in the late 1870s and named it *Dolphin*. At his boatyard on Roanoke Island, Creef taught numerous individuals how to build shad boats.



In 1882 on Roanoke Island, George Washington Creef designed and built the shad boat *Paul Jones*. Named for a tugboat that pushed timber barges from the now abandoned Buffalo City, *Paul Jones* measured 25-feet long by 8-feet wide. The boats' planks, frames, and knees were constructed from Atlantic white cedar, colloquially known as "juniper." Juniper is both rot and insect resistant, as well as pliable, making it an excellent wood for boat construction. For the next 100 years, *Paul Jones* served no fewer than four different owners as a commercial fishing boat. In 1983, the boat returned to the Creef family, who removed *Paul Jones* from the water and stored it in a shed in Manteo. In 2023, the property in Manteo that housed *Paul Jones* was sold. With nowhere to go, it appeared that *Paul Jones* was destined for destruction. For months, the Creef family worked with the

us to learn about our maritime cultural heritage. Few oral histories pertaining to shad boats were recorded; the boatbuilders did not create boat plans and preferred to pass their knowledge on to others during the building process. All that we have left are photographs and the boats themselves. Fortunately, the museum acquired the *Paul Jones* and the Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum generously supported them by providing funding for a trailer to transport and store the boat at museum property for years to come. Following conservation work on the boat, museum staff plan to display the *Paul Jones* at the annual Wooden Boat Show on the first Saturday of May in 2024. ■

David Bennett is the curator of maritime history for the North Carolina Maritime Museums.



Paul Jones, built by George Washington Creef, inside the North Carolina Maritime Museum's Harvey W. Smith Watercraft Center. NC Maritime Museum

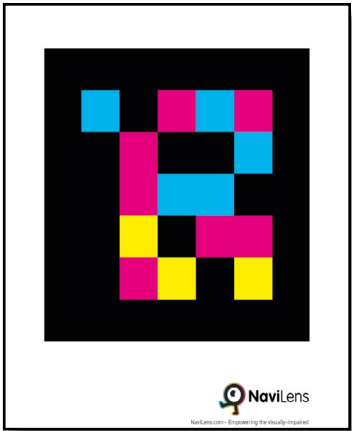
Discover Navilens: Making the Museum Accessible for Everyone

By Christine Brin

The North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort has been working with the new Navilens program to make the museum more accessible to visitors with low or no vision. Paid for in part by a grant from the Beaufort Lions Club, this program is free for museum visitors. Navilens is designed to use the newest smart phone technology to help convey interpretative and navigational information about the museum and exhibits through the user's phone. While designed for people with vision impairment, Navilens has proven to be useful for all visitors as expanded and newly discovered information regarding artifacts and exhibits is included in the content. This project would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support and guidance from museum volunteer Peter Crumley.

What is Navilens?

Navilens is an application, or "app," that uses your smart phone camera to navigate spaces marked with Navilens tags (colorful images that work like



The colorful Navilens tags look like QR codes but require the Navilens app for users to experience the content.

QR codes). The app, which can be downloaded from any app store, is free to users and does not require registration. Once museum visitors have the app on their phones, they can scan the associated tags posted around the museum to find their way around the space. After scanning a tag, visitors will be able to listen to or read associated content that covers exhibit and artifact descriptions, displayed exhibit text, excerpts from research, and additional information about the museum's exhibits and artifacts.

Who is the Navilens program designed for?

Though the program was initially designed for the visually impaired, it has been set up for use by all museum visitors. The program automatically translates content to the default language of the visitor's phone, making exhibit content accessible for non-English speaking guests. The content includes physical descriptions of the building, exhibits, and artifacts that are read audibly for museum visitors with limited or no vision. The content also includes additional information not found in the displayed exhibit text, giving all Navilens users, including the sighted, more information than they would receive from just reading the exhibit panels.

Where are the tags?

The museum has 150 Navilens tags, with 130 currently posted around the museum and 20 reserved for use during special events and programming. These tags are posted near exhibits, artifacts, and structural features to assist with interpretation and navigation of both the exhibits and the building.

When can we use the Navilens tags?

The Navilens tags can be used anytime the museum is open. The tags are currently posted in the museum, and the app is available for download any time. Content for each tag has been uploaded to Navilens. As the content exists in a digital format, it may be pulled from time to time to make changes or additions. The Navilens program will notify users if content is temporarily not available for a particular tag.

Why should visitors use this app?

Visitors may prefer to have the text from exhibits read out to them through the app as a personal choice. Others may need the text read to them by the program because they are physically unable to do it themselves, or they may need the text translated to another language (the app translates to 35 different languages). There are many advantages to this audio style tour, the greatest of which is increasing accessibility for all visitors.



The Navilens tags are picked up by smart phone cameras; users only need to hold out their phone and scan from one side to the other. NC Maritime Museum

Using Navilens

Museum staff encourage all visitors to download the app and experiment with it. Individual feedback will help guide future changes and updates to the program. For more information or to share suggestions, thoughts or feedback, please email Christine Brin, associate curator of education, at Christine.Brin@dnr.nc.gov.

Christine Brin is an associate curator of education at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort.

Registration! Junior Sailing Program

The Junior Sailing Program offers basic through advanced sailing instruction to youth ages 8 and older. This exciting program teaches the arts of rigging, sailing and seamanship, and introduces students to maritime traditions and history. The program is designed to teach the basic skills of sailing to beginners and to hone the skills of more advanced students, using a combination of time in the classroom and on the water. Registration begins Tuesday, January 16, 2024. For more information about Junior Sailing or registration, contact the Friends office at (252) 728-1638.



Mark Your Calendar!

- 2023**
- Oct. 15 Fall In-The-Water Meet
 - Nov. 4 Boatshop Bash
 - Dec. 2 Friends of the Museum Holiday Flotilla
 - Dec. 3 Annual Membership Meeting and Holiday Open House
- 2024**
- Jan. 19 Clam Chowder Cook Off
 - May 4 Wooden Boat Show
 - Jun. 1 Bricks Reception at Gallants Channel
 - Jun. 8 Maritime Day
 - Jun. 10–Aug. 9 Junior Sailing Program
 - Jun. 14 Boat Shoes & Bow Ties Fundraiser
 - Jul. 4 Fireworks at Gallants Channel
 - Jul. 19 Crab Cake Cook Off

For details call (252) 728-1638 or visit www.maritimefriends.org

Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras

Krupp Gun Finds New Home at Hatteras Museum

By Molly Trivelpiece

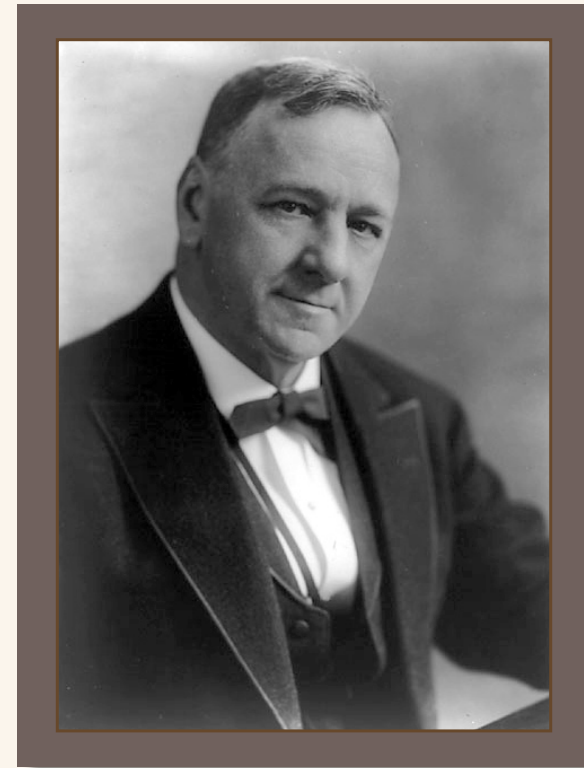
A World War I era gun will soon be on permanent display on the front porch of the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras. The gun is a German-made, 88-milimeter Krupp deck gun that was taken from a German naval vessel after the end of World War I. While the gun itself may not have a direct connection to North Carolina, its previous owner does. North Carolinian Josephus Daniels was U.S. Secretary of the Navy from 1913 to 1921 and owned the Raleigh newspaper *News & Observer*. He obtained the Krupp gun as a war memento from his friend and future president of the United States Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Daniels had family ties to the Outer Banks and visited often, with accounts of him living in Ocracoke for part of his youth. One of his cousins, John T. Daniels, was a surfman of the U.S. Life-Saving Service Station Kill Devil Hills and took the famous photo of the Wright brothers first flight. But that's not the only link between the gun and the Outer Banks.



The Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk taken by John T. Daniels. Orville Wright lies face down on the plane while Wilbur Wright stands to the right. Photo from the Library of Congress.

U.S. Army General William "Billy" Mitchell, name-sake of the airstrip at Frisco, is famous for his World War I experience as a U.S. air combat commander. He was a strong proponent of military use of aircraft in battle. Mitchell proved his ideas during tests off the United States coast where aircraft made repeated passes and targeted vessels below with ordnance.



Washington, North Carolina, native Josephus Daniels, US Secretary of the Navy, 1913 – 1921. Photo from the Library of Congress.

Mitchell's tests off the Virginia coast in 1921 targeted a decommissioned Navy battleship and three German Navy vessels (one of which is the likely source of the Krupp gun). He completed further demonstrations at Cape Hatteras in 1923 using two more decommissioned Navy vessels. The results were heavily in favor of Mitchell's proposal to fight battles from the air. As Secretary of the Navy, Daniels was concerned with General Mitchell's theories; if proven, they could affect funding for his navy. When he left appointment in early 1921, Daniels voiced opposition to Mitchell's tests, stating pilots would be blown to atoms attempting to drop bombs on the deck of a naval vessel before they "could get close enough to drop salt on the tail of the Navy." It is no surprise how this debate eventually played out, with aircraft today being commonly used in battle.

After receiving the Krupp gun, Daniels installed it outside his Raleigh home. The almost ironic memento of successful aerial bombing in the face of Daniels' objections sat for many years in front of his former home until 2021

when the house was torn down. The gun was acquired by the state and sent to South Carolina for conservation. The work was done at Clemson University's Warren Lasch Conservation Center. Relocation of the Krupp gun to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum took place in July 2023. The Carolina Stone Setting Company volunteered their time and effort to safely move the gun to its new home. A five-person team towed a crane from Cary, North Carolina, where they are based, to Hatteras. The crew used the crane to carefully strap and lift the 1,500-pound gun from a trailer in front of the museum, maneuver it through the tricky overhead beams, and place it at a predetermined location on the front porch. Bill Francis, the museum's facilities manager, secured the gun to the porch the following day.



The Krupp gun awaits being moved to the porch of the museum. NC Maritime Museum.

The Krupp gun is currently undergoing more conservation and restoration work and will return to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum when complete. While the museum continues to undergo renovations, the gun will be restored to near-working order. The gun will not be able to fire live rounds but will be available for educational programs that demonstrate how it was operated. The gun will be stanchioned off for the safety of both the artifact and the public. ■

Molly Trivelpiece is the curator of education at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras.



The crane lifts the gun into place. NC Maritime Museum.



The final push into its precise position on the base. NC Maritime Museum.



Museum staff Bill Francis and Josh Leh (on the left), and the Carolina Stone Setting Company crew (right). Photo from Joy Crist.

100 Years of Billy Mitchell

By Molly Trivelpiece

September 2023 marked the centennial anniversary of a pivotal event in the history of military aviation: aerial test bombing conducted by U.S. Army General William Mitchell off Hatteras Island. This historic event not only showcased the potential of using airplanes in battle but also laid the foundation for modern strategic warfare and naval aviation. William “Billy” Mitchell, an influential figure in the early development of airpower, was an advocate for the recognition of the airplane as a dominant force in modern warfare of his time. Despite initial skepticism from the military establishment, Mitchell’s efforts to demonstrate the capabilities of aerial bombing were realized in the summer of 1923 off Hatteras Island. He aimed to prove that airplanes, specifically bombers, could effectively target and sink naval vessels, shifting the focus of military strategy from traditional battleship warfare to air-centric tactics.

In June 1923, Mitchell expanded on his earlier demonstrations conducted off Virginia and orchestrated a series of test bombings off Cape Hatteras. He targeted decommissioned World War I-era battleships USS *Virginia* and USS *New Jersey*. These tests aimed to simulate real-world naval combat scenarios, showcasing the potential of aerial bombardment against heavily armored naval vessels. Using a combination of bombs and torpedoes, Mitchell’s planes successfully struck the ships, highlighting the vulnerability of battleships to precision air attacks.

Mitchell’s tests had far-reaching consequences that extended beyond the immediate success of the demonstrations. The event prompted a paradigm shift in military thinking as naval and military leaders recognized the potential of airpower for reshaping the dynamics of warfare. This realization marked the beginning of a change from battleship-centered strategies to an air-centric approach, leading to the rise of aircraft carriers as the centerpiece of navy fleets. The test bombing also catalyzed advancements in aerial technology. The success of the bombings underscored the importance of accurate targeting systems and the need for specialized munitions for air-to-sea warfare. Demand propelled the development of precision bombing techniques, aerial torpedoes, and improved aircraft designs, all of which contributed to the evolution of modern aerial warfare.

The legacy of Mitchell’s test bombing off Hatteras Island reverberated through military and aviation history. Recognizing the transformative



U.S.S. *Virginia*, one of the decommissioned Navy vessels used in Mitchell’s aerial bombing demonstrations. *Photo from United States Navy.*



United States Army Brigadier General William ‘Billy’ Lendrum Mitchell. *Photo from United States Air Force.*

potential of airpower, military forces worldwide invested heavily in aircraft carriers and naval aviation programs. Additionally, Mitchell’s advocacy for a specialized force eventually led to the establishment of the United States Air Force as an independent branch of the military. Mitchell also left a lasting impact on the culture of Hatteras Island; the airstrip at Frisco, several roads, and a former motel were named in his honor.

William “Billy” Mitchell’s aerial test bombings in 1923 were a seminal event that forever altered the course of military strategy and technology. By showcasing the effectiveness of aerial bombardment against naval vessels, Mitchell’s demonstrations ushered in a new era of warfare, centered on the dominance of airpower. The legacy of these tests can be observed in the modern military landscape, where aircraft carriers and aerial warfare strategies have become integral components of national defense. The recent commemoration of the centennial anniversary of Mitchell’s tests reminds us of his lasting impact on shaping the trajectory of military aviation and strategic thinking. ■

Molly Trivelpiece is the curator of education at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras.

Museum Renovation Updates

By Molly Trivelpiece

While the renovation may seem slow-going, the plan remains to reopen in the middle of 2024. Most of the work up to this point will hardly be noticed by visitors. Contractors have been running new electrical lines, redoing the lights, and making mounts for artifacts. A few of the more noticeable changes previous patrons will see is the new color of the walls and two new entranceways into the gallery, one from the lobby, and the other connecting to the gift shop. The agenda for renovations is ramping up; the next major step is mounting the largest artifact, the Monomoy surfboat.

The Monomoy surfboat, on loan from the U.S. Coast Guard and a staple exhibit of the museum in the past, was placed on its mount in September. It is displayed as a boat cresting a wave, a visually dramatic representation of what U.S. Life-Saving Service and U.S. Coast Guard crews had to face to reach survivors on stranded or sinking vessels.



The Monomoy surfboat sits in the corner of the gallery, out of the way from ongoing construction. *NC Maritime Museum.*



Artistic rendering of a lifesaving crew in action. *NC Maritime Museum.*

Too large to be taken out of the gallery for construction, the boat was tightly wrapped to protect it from dirt and dust. The artifact was put on wheels so it could easily be moved around the gallery floor and out of the way of work being done. ■

Molly Trivelpiece is the curator of education at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras.

North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport

The *La Rosa* Cannon

By John Moseley

In either late October or early November 1804, Spanish merchant ship *La Rosa de Bilbao* left the port of Havana, Cuba, bound for Bilbao, Spain. On board were an estimated 1,600 boxes of sugar and a large number of silver coins. In mid-November a storm damaged the ship as it was nearing Cape Fear. In response, the crew of *La Rosa* altered course and turned for the port at Wilmington, North Carolina. The ship foundered, missed the channel, and ran aground on Frying Pan Shoals south of Bald Head Island. Sighting the wrecked ship, river pilot Wilson Davis made for Bald Head Island to pick up the survivors and bring them to Fort Johnston. The Spanish crew related that, “the captain and mate had died at sea, and having no navigator onboard they had put the ship before the wind and run her on shore near the cape.”

Davis noted the following regarding the shipwreck survivors: “This crew, a villainous looking set of rascals, that I had no doubt they were.” They were held under suspicion of mutiny as they were in custody of so much money and claimed a missing captain and mate. The crew was sent to Charleston, South Carolina, where the ship was known by some of the merchants; but since there was no proof of any crime being committed, the crew members were released.

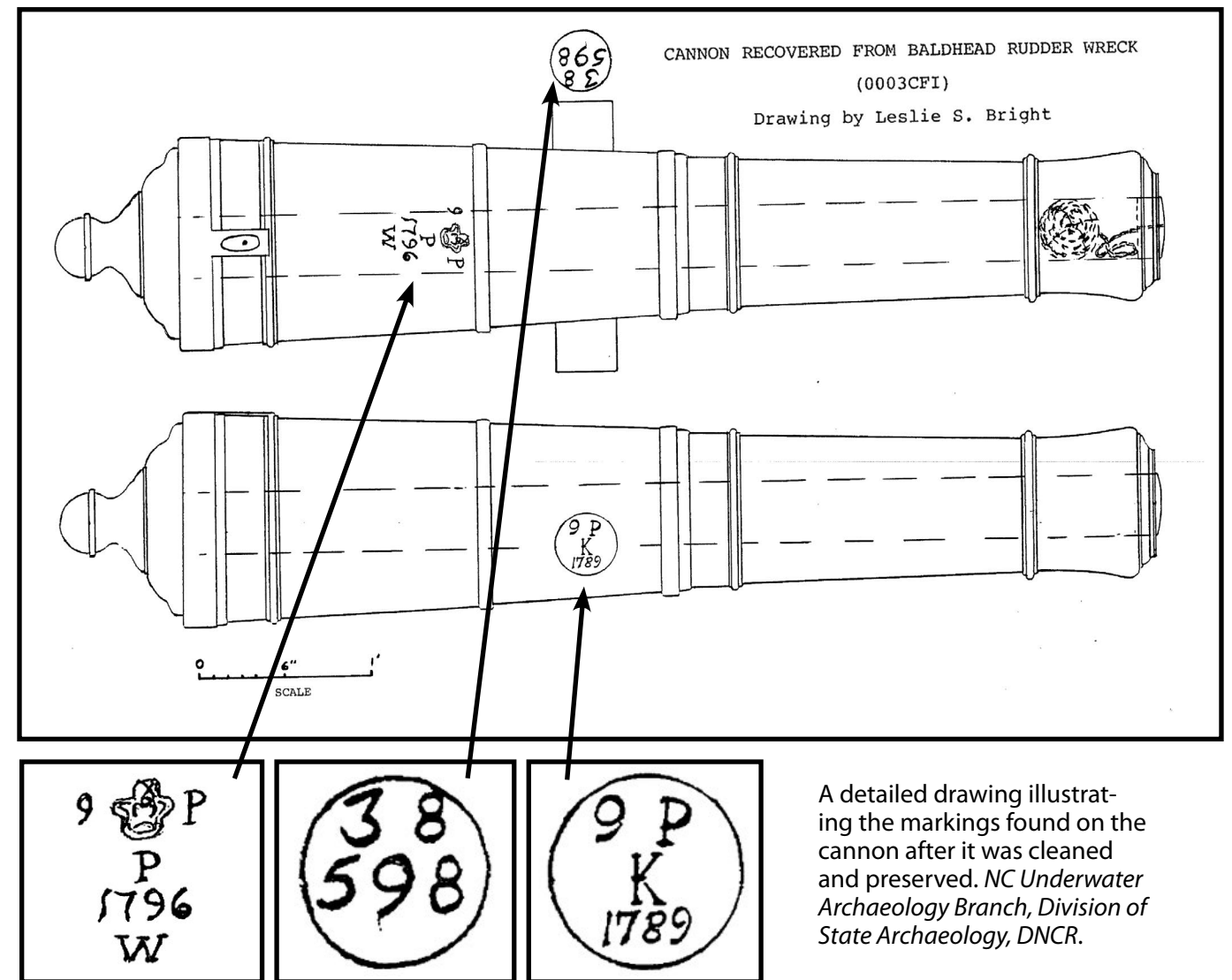
The ship *St. Rosa, Don Policarpo Maria Fernandez*, from Havanna bound to Bilbao, with a cargo of 1616 boxes Sugar, having sprung a-leak, in attempting to make this port was cast away on the Frying Pan, on Thursday last. The crew, 24 in number, were all saved—the ship and cargo entirely lost.

The report of the sinking of *La Rosa de Bilbao* in the *Wilmington Gazette*. It was misidentified as ‘*Santa Rosa*.’ The *Wilmington Gazette*, Wilmington, North Carolina, November 20, 1804.

Over the last two centuries there have been rumors of silver coins from the 1804 wreck of *La Rosa* washing up on the beach near Cape Fear. During the 1980s, Bald Head Island developers funded a search for the ship and its reported cache of silver coins, hiring a diver and salvager. In early November 1987, divers found the wreck off Bald Head Island in 20 feet of water. They notified the North Carolina Underwater Archaeology Branch at Fort Fisher and together they surveyed the site to decide which artifacts to recover. On November 20, 1987, the ship’s 14-foot long, 1,500-pound rudder was raised to the surface. Over the next few months, divers inspected the wreck; on May 19, 1988, the ship’s 1,800-pound cannon was recovered. Continued difficulties at the dive site caused operations to cease later that year. No silver coins were ever found, and no attempt has been made by state underwater archaeologists to return to the site. Mud and silt have since re-claimed the wreck.

Details on the cannon from *La Rosa* were uncovered after it underwent conservation. The markings “9P,” “K,” and “1789” were found on the right trunnion. This indicated the cannon was cast in the year 1789 as a 9-pounder by gunmaker George Knott. Knott worked at the Woolrich Arsenal, which is identified by a “W” on top of the barrel. In addition to the letter, the year 1796 was also marked on the top of the barrel indicating the year the cannon was proofed. To “proof” a cannon was to test the ability of the cannon to survive pressurization of the tube. If the cannon is defective it will explode during the test. If it survives, the cannon is marked with a proof mark to indicate it is sound. These marks can be seen on the artifact currently on display at the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport. The marks bring up an interesting question: “Why was a British cannon on a Spanish ship?” After years of research, the following theory may explain how this might have happened.

As noted by the markings on the cannon, it was cast in 1789 and proofed in 1796 in Britain. The biggest issue understanding the cannon is the length of its barrel. When the cannon was recovered, the weight was recorded at 1800 pounds and the length at 5 feet 8 inches. Letters were sent to the Royal Armouries and historic artillery consultants in the United Kingdom. They mentioned in their response the cannon’s length for a 9-pounder (referring to the weight of shot that it can handle) was not unusual. It was also thought the cannon was “most likely captured.” According to David McConnell in *British Smoothbore Artillery: A Technological Study*, “in the mid-1780s or early 1790s,



A detailed drawing illustrating the markings found on the cannon after it was cleaned and preserved. NC Underwater Archaeology Branch, Division of State Archaeology, DNCR.

[Captain Thomas Blomefield, the Inspector General of Artillery at Woolwich] produced specifications for his design of [cast iron] 9-pounders, four of which were for garrison and sea service and the fifth exclusively for land service. It is impossible to say how quickly these guns were introduced.” The *La Rosa* cannon matches the weight and, very closely, the length of the cannon produced for British military land service in the 1790s. Based on this information, it is believed that the cannon can be connected to an earlier battle in 1797.

Spain and France had been allies since the 1730s; but with the overthrow of the French monarchy, Spain joined the First Coalition against Republican France. Unfortunately for Spain, their army was ill prepared and outmatched by the French. After suffering a series of defeats, Spain signed a treaty with France to declare war on Britain in 1796. In response to the declaration, the British Navy quickly blockaded all Spanish ports. The economy of Spain was heavily dependent on its

Central and South American colonies. To break the British blockade, the Spanish Navy assembled a massive fleet of 27 ship-of-the-line to challenge the British Mediterranean fleet comprised of 15 ship-of-the-line. On February 14, 1797, both fleets met off Cape St. Vincent in southwestern Spain. The British Navy’s aggressive nature and superior discipline led them to a resounding victory that the Spanish Navy never recovered from.

The British decided to take the offensive against wealthy Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. One year after the Battle off Cape St. Vincent, a fleet of British warships and transports arrived at the island of Trinidad. The British troops landed and encircled the capital; the colonial government surrendered soon thereafter. The British then decided to attack a wealthier colony to the northwest, Puerto Rico. A powerful military outpost key to the Spanish Empire and doorway to the riches of the Americas, Puerto Rico had long been coveted by nations for its strategic location.

continued...

The *La Rosa* Cannon *continued...*

Arriving at San Juan in April 1797, British General Ralph Abercrombie and Admiral Sir Henry Harvey landed between 7,000 and 13,000 troops just east of San Juan. The Spanish colonials were ready and waiting with a defense in depth. In the seventh appendix of the book *The Eighteenth Century and the British Attack on Puerto Rico 1797*, authors Maria M. Alonso and Milagros Flores record a Regiment of Royal Artillerymen as a part of the attack on the city. But after nearly a month and seven-day bombardment, the British could not make any headway. The Spanish defense was successful in preventing the British troops from reaching the city; they were thought to be impregnable. Forced to retreat, the British army left behind muskets, ammunition, food, clothes, and, you guessed it, cannons.

After the battle, the Spanish now found themselves in position of numerous cannon to use for the defense of Spanish Colonial possessions. The Spanish may have used these “captured” cannon wherever they needed. While many were kept for the defenses of San Juan,

some may have been used in fortifications and ships throughout the Caribbean to fight off British attacks. An iron 9-pounder cannon would be a great addition to the armament of any ship, including *La Rosa de Bilboa*. This size cannon was listed as a “chaser” cannon and would have been used for mounting in the stern or bow of a ship. In the 1880s, remaining British cannons in Puerto Rico from the 1797 battle in San Juan were melted down to make a statue of the city’s founder, Juan Ponce de León.

Researchers are not certain if this is the answer to how a British cannon ended up on *La Rosa*, a Spanish ship that sank in the waters off Cape Fear, but marvel at the idea that such an interesting artifact could have an even more interesting story. The cannon provides a learning opportunity and provokes one to think about the bigger maritime picture related to European expansion and naval history. ■

John Moseley is the museum manager at the NC Maritime Museum at Southport.



The recovered *La Rosa* cannon was sent to the NC Underwater Archaeology Lab at Fort Fisher for conservation. NC Underwater Archaeology Branch, Division of State Archaeology, DNCR.



Staff and volunteers created a new exhibit in the museum foyer for the *La Rosa* cannon. The cannon markings can easily be seen, allowing staff to interpret the artifact properly and tell the maritime history of the lower Cape Fear. NC Maritime Museum.

New Commercial Fishing Exhibit and Revised Hurricane Exhibit.

With support from the Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport and work accomplished by staff from the Southport museum and the North Carolina Maritime Museum system, a new commercial fishing exhibit has been installed in the main gallery of the museum. Focusing on the commercial fishing operations of the Cape Fear region, the exhibit covers shrimping, shellfish harvesting, mullet seining, and the menhaden fishery. Other lesser-known fisheries like shad and sturgeon are included as well. Informative panels on the types of fishing gear used, the local work force, historic fish houses, boatbuilding operations, and innovations in processing fish products are all packed into the exhibit. Museum guests will be able to man the wheel of a fishing vessel and view some fish house scenes for a full experience of the lower Cape Fear’s fishing past. The exhibit is designed to inspire people to learn about and appreciate the local fishing industries



Replica wheelhouse offers hands-on experience. NC Maritime Museum.

and how they influenced the economy and culture of Southeastern North Carolina over the last few centuries. In addition to the new commercial fishing exhibit, a revised display on hurricanes has been completed. Stories and images on new graphic panels reveal how these severe storms disrupted life, destroyed property, and altered the land in the region. ■

Friends of the Museum
North Carolina Maritime Museum, Inc.
315 Front Street
Beaufort, NC 28516



NC DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The North Carolina Maritime Museums in Hatteras, Beaufort and Southport are part of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Reid Wilson, Secretary.



The North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums.

The MarITimes is printed using private funds donated to each Friends of the Museum organization.

Follow Us!



**North Carolina Maritime Museum
in Beaufort**
315 Front Street
Beaufort, NC 28516
(252) 504-7740
www.ncmaritimemuseumbeaufort.com

Hours:
Mon.–Sat. 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sun. 12–5 p.m.



**Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum
in Hatteras**
59200 Museum Drive
Hatteras, NC 27943
(252) 986-0720
www.graveyardoftheatlantic.com

**Currently closed for renovations.
Will reopen mid-2024.**



**North Carolina Maritime Museum
at Southport**
204 E. Moore Street
Southport, NC 28461
(910) 477-5150
www.ncmaritimemuseumssouthport.com

Hours:
Tues.–Sat. 10 a.m.–4 p.m.