

THE MARITIMES



THE MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH CAROLINA MARITIME MUSEUMS

HATTERAS • BEAUFORT • SOUTHPORT

SUMMER/FALL 2024



The centerpiece of the newly renovated exhibit gallery at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum. See story on pages 14-15. *Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.*

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NORTH CAROLINA
**MARITIME
MUSEUMS**
BEAUFORT HATTERAS SOUTHPORT

THE MARITIMES

Vol.14/Issue 1

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BEAUFORT HATTERAS SOUTHPORT

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*One historic coast.
Three unique museums.*



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Aleta: The Tale of Two Boats

By Tessa Johnstone

The North Carolina Maritime Museum system recently acquired not one, but two models of the North Carolina built boat *Aleta*. Why does the museum system need two models of the same boat? Well, it's a tale of two boats.

Aleta lived a long and industrious life, spanning from the 1920s to the 1980s, first as a mail runner and later as a shrimper. Having models of *Aleta* in the different iterations helps us show the ingenuity of local people to rework a single boat for many

purposes then use it for years. The 42-foot round-stern vessel was constructed by Ambrose Fulcher in 1923 at Atlantic in Carteret County. It's intended use was for ferrying mail between Morehead City and Atlantic, under Captain Howard Nelson. *Aleta*'s construction, which was similar to a shad boat, allowed for the ship to navigate Core and Back sounds, making the journey between Morehead City and Atlantic easier than by vehicle in the era of unpaved roads. In the 1930s, *Aleta* was briefly used as a buy-boat transporting fish purchased out on the sounds directly from fishermen. In 1938 the boat was sold to Captain Wilber Nelson who reverted it back to a mail boat. At this point, *Aleta*'s route changed from Atlantic-Morehead City to Atlantic-Ocracoke, crossing the sound daily until 1964, when mail began being trucked down the Outer Banks via Hatteras Island and ferry crossing at Hatteras Inlet.

Aleta's usefulness did not end after retirement from mail service. The boat was sold to Elmo Fulcher who, after significant changes (which are illustrated in the second model now in the museums' collection) began shrimping in Core and Pamlico sounds. Fulcher's modifications included shortening the cabin in order to install outriggers, stabilizers, and winches. *Aleta* trawled the coastal waters into the 1980s. Plans for much needed work never materialized, the old work boat was hauled up South River in Carteret County where it eventually sank.

The pair of boat models of *Aleta* illustrate the changes made to the design during the differing careers as a mail boat and as a shrimper. *Aleta* connected the Down East and Ocracoke areas for more than fifty years, hauling mail, materials, people, and seafood from community to community. The North Carolina Maritime Museums' staff appreciate and thank Herbert Prytherch, the maker of these models, for helping us acquire them for the museums' collection. ■

Tessa Johnstone is the collections manager for the North Carolina Maritime Museums.



▲ *Aleta* as a mailboat,
Herbert Prytherch.
NC Maritime Museum.

◀ *Aleta* trawler model by
Herbert Prytherch.
NC Maritime Museum.



Mailboat *Aleta* at Atlantic, Carteret County, 1950.
Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

From The Friends

BEAUFORT: Focused On The Future

The Friends of the Museum in Beaufort have continued our focus on enabling the museum to expand its exhibits and reach within the community. One of the ways we've done this is by adding four new members this year to our Board of Directors. These new members bring varying backgrounds and new ideas, which helps facilitate discussion around new ways to support the museum's staff and volunteers.

Our focus has always been and continues to be enabling the museum growth by supporting new educational exhibits and programs, along with improving facilities. One of the goals of the museum is to educate the public about our maritime heritage and its significance—and ours is to assist them in this mission in any way we can.

Some of our current focus areas for the museum are:

- Obtaining key artifacts in support of America's 250th celebration in 2026;
- Continuing fundraising in order to add to the major new exhibit fund we have established;
- Partnering with the museum, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and the Maritime Heritage Foundation in the planning and development of the new Gallants Channel facilities.

We are also dedicated to improving our own popular sailing programs. Key updates include hiring a new program supervisor for the Junior Sailing Program and continuing to expand our Adult Sailing Program and Youth Sailing Team.

The Friends is a dedicated group of individuals who share a common goal: to support and enhance the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort in executing its mission. Learn more about what we do and how you can be an active member by visiting our website, maritimefriends.org.

Bob Terwilliger

President

Friends of the Museum in Beaufort ■

SOUTHPORT: Greetings from the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport!

As you may recall from previous notes, the crew—our wonderful state employees, John Moseley, Shannon Walker, and Toni Foster—was working hard with the North Carolina Maritime Museum System staff to get the new commercial fishing exhibit "A Way of Life—Working the Water" in place. I am happy to let you all know that the exhibit, along with a revamped hurricane exhibit "Storms that Shape Us," was officially christened on April 3. We are extremely proud that our fundraising efforts funded these two exhibits to the tune of more than \$48,000. We look forward to each and every visitor learning a bit more about our Lower Cape Fear maritime history and culture through their experience with these new exhibits.

Speaking of fundraising, our third annual Jazz Night held April 26 was a fun and successful event that brought further support to our wonderful museum. Such occasions like this will help fund more exhibits, support museum educators with teaching during the school year, offset the costs of special events, and assist in daily operations at the museum. If you haven't checked out our website in a while, please go to friendsncmmsouthport.com and consider joining or renewing your membership with the Friends of the Museum!

Thank you for your continued interest in preserving and sharing our maritime history—in Southport and throughout North Carolina and our nation. Please know that the museum is ready for your visit! Come see us in Southport, and of course, fair winds.

Tom Hale

Chairman

Friends of the NC Maritime Museum at Southport ■

HATTERAS: A Grand Re-opening

With a fair wind and following sea, the long-awaited re-opening of the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum after a two year-comprehensive exhibit overhaul will be well underway and enjoying explosive visitation by the time you read these few lines. The renovation was completed under the leadership of now-retired North Carolina Maritime Museum Director Joe Schwarzer, Interim Maritime Museum Director Maria Vann, and the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, the Friends, our volunteers, the Outer Banks community, Dare County government, the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau, and others.

The effort to shape the exhibits and support them with artifacts from collections and storage inside the museum, helps us present a full and accurate history of the Outer Banks and the North Carolina coast in an impressive interaction of highly visual displays and hands-on, family-friendly technology. The "wow!" factor in the all-new gallery is highlighted by the Monomoy surfboat display with its seasoned, powerfully built surfmen negotiating incoming storm surf, so striking in its presentation that visitors just may find themselves instinctively wiping salt spray from their eyes.

The outside of the museum, with its stunning ship timbers design, remains the same. Interior structural changes include a relocation of the front desk to the center of the room backed by a curved wall that leads guests into the main gallery. The rooms to the right of the front doors are being reworked into a library/education space and the Meekins Chandlery Gift Shop is redesigned to add an entry from the main gallery. Overall, the design is set up to be adaptable and updated for new experiences as the opportunities present. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Danny Couch

Chairman

Friends of the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum ■

North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport

Coming soon: *The Glorious Cause of Liberty*

By Shannon Walker

The North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport is partnering with the City of Southport for an upcoming symposium, living history, and nighttime commemoration that will help tell the story of the historic grounds the museum calls home. The event, *The Glorious Cause of Liberty: The 250th Anniversary of the Burning of Fort Johnston*, will be held July 19, 2025, as part of North Carolina's America 250 commemorative events (More information on the statewide initiative can be found at america250.nc.gov). In Southport, July 19, 2025, will kick-off with a series of programs, events, exhibits, and more focusing on the peoples of Lower Cape Fear's role in the American Revolution. Though the recent commemorations at Halifax, North Carolina marking the Halifax Resolves were the official kick-off to North Carolina's America 250 events, the FIRST event to tell the story of military action in the colony will be occurring here in the Lower Cape Fear on the grounds of Fort Johnston.

But what exactly happened? Why, one of the most blatantly mutinous and rebellious actions that the citizens could have committed against the British Crown. In May of 1775, North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin, like many royal governors in the American colonies, found himself in a pickle. Years of contention and complicated relations between the citizens of the colony and the Crown were at a head, with neither trusting the other. It was becoming clear that a violent revolution was on its way. Fearing for his family's safety, Martin sent them to New York and shortly thereafter left the palace in New Bern for the only standing fort in North Carolina, Fort Johnston.

Construction on Fort Johnston began in early 1748. It had been built to help beef up the colony's defenses during King George's War. In its first incarnation, the fort was a wooden structure with earthen berms. Tabby (coquina) walls were added in the 1760s, visitors can still see what is left of these walls on the Southport waterfront at low tide. The location was great, but the fort wasn't the best constructed. At the time that Governor Martin arrived at Fort Johnston on June 2, the fort was commanded by Swiss born Captain John Abraham Collet. Captain Collet is best known for creating a detailed map of the North Carolina colony that bears his name, even though the bulk of the work had done by surveyor Willam Churton. Collet made several improvements to the Fort during his time there, much at his own expense on very little pay. Despite the improvements,

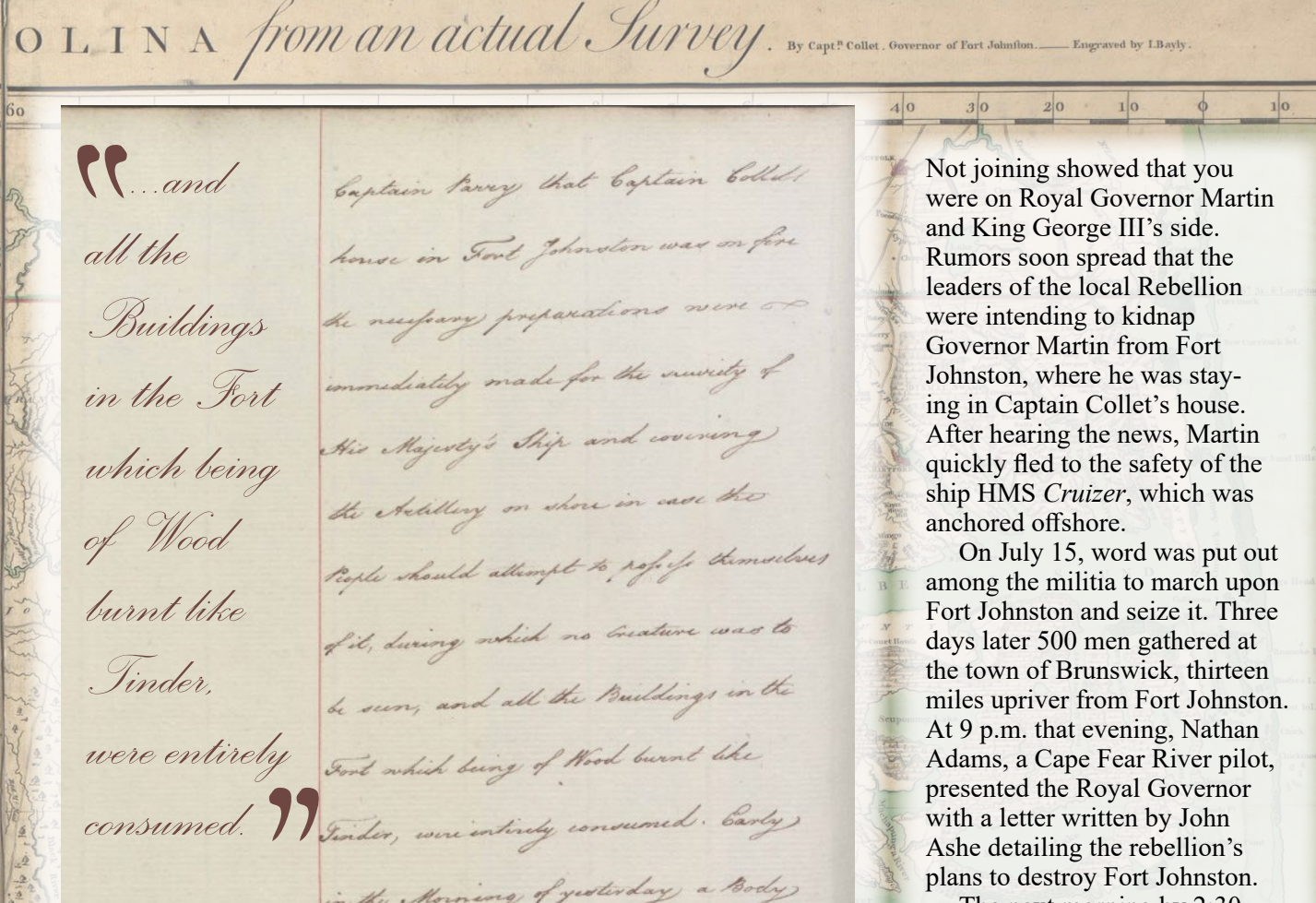
Captain Collet wasn't very popular with the locals; he made numerous enemies among the who's who of the Lower Cape Fear community.

After arriving at Fort Johnston, Royal Governor Martin hoped to reassemble and reestablish his authority over the colony of North Carolina. He wrote a letter requesting military supplies to help arm the fort and to restore his military commission so that he could quell the rebellion by force (though the latter request was denied). As an agent of King George III, king of Great Britain and Ireland, Governor Martin could not and would not abandon his post as the threat of violence and rebellion grew beyond the fort's walls. Those leading the rebellion were concerned about the royal governor and what methods he could take to "restore order," with concerns of a repeat of the violent suppression of the Regulator Movement of 1770. Martin's correspondence requesting military supplies and support was intercepted, and the patriots were not planning on being forced into submission as those in 1770 were.

At the forefront of this group of men were locals John Ashe and Cornelius Harnett. Both in their fifties, these men had long been in contention with the crown; both played key roles during the Stamp Act Rebellion of 1766. On July 7, the Wilmington Committee of Safety passed a resolution requiring the enlistment of every white male resident in the city to join the militia against the Crown.



Today during low tides, you can see the remains of the coquina walls of Fort Johnston. NC Maritime Museum.



Portion of the correspondence from Josiah Martin regarding the events that transpired at Fort Johnston on July 19, 1775. Image from *The National Archives*.



Detail of the 1770 map of North Carolina that bears Captain John Abraham Collet's name. Note the depiction of Fort Johnston near the mouth of the Cape Fear. Image from Library of Congress.

dozen troops and very little gunpowder, Captain Collet knew that he could not defend Fort Johnston and fled before the attack. The crowd of rebellious men eventually swelled to 800, one by one the buildings of the fort were set on fire right in front of the royal governor of North Carolina and in direct defiance of King George III. The destruction of the fort by patriot militia marked the first military action of the American Revolutionary War in North Carolina.

This story only scratches the surface of this specific event. There is much more to tell regarding the lead-up, political upheaval, and fascinating individuals behind the events of that hot summer night. Be sure to mark your calendars and help us commemorate this turning point in the history of the Lower Cape Fear, the colony, and subsequently the new nation.

Shannon Walker is the curator of programming and education at the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport.

Welcoming the Exhibits *A Way of Life—Working the Water* and *The Storms That Shape Us*

By Shannon Walker



Spotting for schools of menhaden from the crow's nest, Southport. Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.



Workers heading shrimp in Southport, late 1930s. Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.



Fishermen on Bald Head Island pose with their skiff, 1939. Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

On the afternoon of April 3, 2024, volunteers, Friends members, and staff commemorated the opening of the museum's newest additions to its core exhibits: *A Way of Life—Working the Water* and *The Storms That Shape Us*.

A Way of Life—Working the Water focuses on the impact the commercial fishing industry has had on life in the Lower Cape Fear. The exhibit tells the story of seven fish industries that impacted the area and some of the individuals behind them. The addition of this exhibit to the museum is timely, as recent environmental and economic shifts have affected the commercial fishing industry; it is quickly disappearing from southeastern North Carolina. Museum guests viewing the exhibit can delve into the lives of individuals like Eugene Gore, one of the first African American menhaden fleet captains, and Johnny Varnum, reformed criminal turned pardoned lifesaver. It explores topics from child labor and unionization to technological advances, such as Josephus F. Bussells' method to reduce waste and increase oil and fertilizer production from fish products. It would be impossible to tell the tales of everyone who made an impact on the commercial fishing industry in the Lower Cape Fear, and this exhibit only scratches the surface in bringing these stories to light.

The unique design of this exhibit is what makes it stand out. It is housed in and around a recreated shrimp trawler with a spot where kids, young and not-so-young, can take a turn at the wheel. You can almost feel the breeze blowing through your hair as you view footage taken from an actual boat scurrying down the Intracoastal Waterway, with the sounds of gulls' kee-ow



Working on the Water exhibit. NC Maritime Museum.

in the background. We must admit that staff may have geeked out just a little at the miniature models of the boats and nets displayed inside the diorama within the ship—don't miss those!

To accommodate the size of *A Way of Life – Working the Water*, adjustments had to be made to the portion of the core exhibit that focused on hurricanes. Previously referred to as *Deadly Dozen*, this exhibit was dismantled and streamlined to fit flush against the wall and cover a more comprehensive narrative of the role hurricanes have played on the Lower Cape Fear over the course of the last 250-plus years. From their effects on the environment to commercial industry, these life changing storms continue to impact the area. This updated version has been renamed *Storms That Shape Us*, and we could not think of a more fitting title.



The aftermath of Hurricane Hazel along the Southport waterfront, 1954. Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.



The Storms That Shape Us exhibit. NC Maritime Museum.

The two exhibits were funded by the Friends of the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport and were made possible through the generous donations of our Friends members and visitors. ■

Shannon Walker is the curator of programming and education at the North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport.

Programs and more!

This summer we are introducing a brand-new program series to help you get your hands on history. *Anchors Aweigh!* is geared toward families of all ages. Each hands-on activity will focus on a specific part of Lower Cape Fear and North Carolina history. These programs are drop-in style and run from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

- June 12 - Go the Distance: Map Reading and Orienteering
- June 26 - Declaring Independence
- July 10 - Wash it Up!: Laundry in the Age of Sail
- July 24 - Show Your Colors: Flags in History
- August 14 - Getting the Message Through: Cyphers and Codes

And don't forget about our yearlong programs: *Skipper's Crew* and *Deep Dives into History!* *Skipper's Crew* can be for all ages but is designed for our youngest patrons. Hands-on activities and crafts focus on combining arts and history. Participants get to go home with something they created themselves! During the first two hours, lights will be dimmed and interactives muted to provide a calmer environment for our patrons with sensitivities. Programs run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

- June 1 - Light It Up!
- July 6 - Shell-abrate America!
- August 3 - Crafty Canoes
- September 7 - Totally Turtles
- October 5 - Spooky Sharks

Deep Dives into History is designed to give visitors a deeper understanding of our shared past through costumed interpreters and artifacts. Programs run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

- July 20 - Rope Making. Who knew that making rope was an art form? Join Tom Lacey and learn about how this essential nautical tool has been made for centuries. There will be a chance to make a bit of rope yourself using our rope machine!
- September 21 - Torpedoes of the American Civil War. Delve into the fascinating technology behind the development and use of torpedo technology during the American Civil War. It promises to be a blast!
- November 16 - 18th Century Blacksmithing. Two hundred and fifty years ago, blacksmiths helped keep ships afloat. Learn about what items they created for nautical industries, and watch a smithy in action!

North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort

US Life-Saving Service Stations of the Central North Carolina Coast

By Benjamin Wunderly

The United States Life-Saving Service, a predecessor of the United States Coast Guard, had a strong presence along North Carolina's coast during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Earlier efforts of the service were concentrated in the northern coastal states but would later expand to the south. In 1848, the United States Congress made efforts to provide equipment and stations along the shores of New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts for the purpose of rescuing the shipwrecked and securing property and cargo. Manned crews were eventually recruited to stand watch at the stations in order to respond to wrecks; they performed rescues day and night, often in harrowing conditions. Those onboard doomed ships along the rest of the seaboard still had to rely on volunteers for their survival. It didn't take long, though, for Chief Sumner Kimball of the Revenue Marine Division to realize more stations were needed to protect lives along the nation's shores, not only in the northeast, but the mid-Atlantic and south too. The rescue-focused operations of the Life-Saving Service were especially necessary in North Carolina where the dangerous sandbars and shoals off the outer barrier islands caused many shipwrecks.

The first seven stations built in our state were in Currituck and Dare counties. They were constructed in 1874 and named for the community or prominent geologic feature where they were placed: Jones Hill (later known as Whale Head, then



Crew of U.S. Life-Saving Service Station Kitty Hawk, Dare County, circa 1900. A tough looking bunch, pulling shipwreck victims from the raging sea in the middle of the night during the coldest time of the year was not for the faint of heart. *Photo from Library of Congress.*

Currituck Beach), Caffey's Inlet, Kitty Hawk, Nags Head, Bodie Island (re-named Oregon Inlet), Chicamacomico, and Little Kinnakeet. By 1905, the number of stations in North Carolina had grown to twenty-nine, stretching from the Virginia line to Carteret County, with one each in New Hanover and Brunswick counties as well. The early structures of the 1870s and 1880s were nothing more than a boat shed with a small kitchen on the first floor and two bunk rooms upstairs. Along the Outer Banks, the stations were situated about seven miles apart. The shores along that stretch of coast were considered the worst; ships ran aground in staggering numbers, requiring the need for more coverage by lifesavers. That didn't mean other areas of our coast didn't have horrifying shipwrecks though. Seven US Life-Saving Service Stations were established in Hyde and Carteret counties. Crews along this central part of the North Carolina shore covered more than 90 miles of beaches, four inlets (Hatteras, Ocracoke, Beaufort, and Bogue), and the dangerous shoals off Cape Lookout.

There were two US Life-Saving Stations that existed in Hyde County on Ocracoke Island. The first, completed in 1883, was Station Ocracoke near Hatteras Inlet. It was re-named Station Hatteras Inlet in 1904 when a second station built at the village of Ocracoke on the opposite end of the island took the name of Station Ocracoke. Imagine the stark difference for the men at each location: one on the desolate windswept and sea ravaged beach near Hatteras Inlet, and the other on the sound side nestled amongst live oak trees and cottages of the village all under the glow of Ocracoke light. Friends and family took time to visit the men at the other end of the island, but the lifesavers were only allowed one day off a week. Depending on where they lived, most of that time may have been spent traveling to their home. Life in the service was demanding in more ways than one.



Station Cape Lookout was the first U.S. Life-Saving Service station to be established in Carteret County. It was similar in design to the early 1870s buildings constructed in Dare and Currituck Counties. *Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.*



The structure type of the Life-Saving Service Station at Portsmouth (Quonochontaug style) is one of only ten remaining in existence that have not undergone extensive modifications. Service architect George R. Tolman designed the original type in 1892 for a station at Quonochontaug, Rhode Island. *Courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.*

Saving lives during storm and hurricane conditions was difficult. The waves and wind destroyed many ships along the coast; the men of the service had to respond no matter what. The harsh conditions took their toll on them and on the station structures as well. Station Hatteras Inlet was one that eventually succumbed to the sea. The water encroached on the support pilings enough that the building was deemed unsafe. Relocation plans did not materialize before Hurricane Ione took the entire structure down in 1955. The edge of the sea is a tough place to exist. The station on Silver Lake at Ocracoke Village was used by the Coast Guard until 1996; five years later it was decommissioned and transferred to the State of North Carolina. The facility has been used for teaching and workshop opportunities for educators from across the state.

The US Life-Saving Service placed five stations south of Hyde County in Carteret County. The first was established in 1887 at Cape Lookout, approximately one and a half miles southwest by west of the Cape Lookout lighthouse. The second was near the village of Portsmouth at Ocracoke Inlet; it was completed in 1894. In 1896, a station was placed almost exactly in between Cape Lookout point and Portsmouth. Named Station Core Bank, it was due east across Core Sound from the village of Atlantic on the mainland; it would later be re-named for that village. The last two stations in Carteret County were located at Fort Macon, 1904, and Bogue Inlet, 1905.

All but two of the buildings from the original stations in Carteret County still stand today. On the islands of Core Banks, Station Portsmouth and Station Cape Lookout are considered historic structures within the Cape Lookout National Seashore; they exist within sites designated on the United States National Register of Historic Places. Both are in remote locations that require a boat ride and hike



Station Ocracoke on Silver Lake was established in 1904 and was used as the Service became part of the U.S. Coast Guard. The original structure was replaced in 1940 by the building in this postcard image. The structure still stands but no longer operates as a Coast Guard Station. *Photo from University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.*

to get to. It is recommended to visit them in the winter when the mosquitos and flies are less noticeable. Station Core Bank (Atlantic) was destroyed by fire in 1968. On the east end of Bogue Banks, the original building of US Life-Saving Service Station Fort Macon no longer exists. The site is still an active US Coast Guard Station within Sector North Carolina, but new buildings have since replaced the 1904 station, a 1939 station, and other outbuildings from that time period. At the west end of the island was Station Bogue Inlet; it is now known as Station Emerald Isle. The original 1905 structure was decommissioned and sold sometime in the 1940s. The 1905 station was moved in 1950 by barge across Bogue Sound to Cedar Point on the mainland. It is privately owned but can be seen from NC Highway 24.

These old stations remind us of a different time when travel by water was so dangerous it required men on shore to be ready to respond 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Today's improved watercraft and navigational technology have not completely made the need for responders obsolete; conditions on the sea can still be treacherous. The US Coast Guard still has a commanding presence in North Carolina and remains on watch every day. The citizens of our state consider it an honor to support the service of the men and women in the United States Coast Guard. Wilmington and Elizabeth City are on the list of 34 officially recognized Certified Coast Guard Cities or Communities. Carteret County is on the list as well, one of only four counties in the nation to receive the designation. These communities have made special efforts to acknowledge the work of the Coast Guard and welcome the service members and their families who may have left their hometowns to serve our nation.

The Coast Guard's first major rescue

In 1915, the US Life-Saving Service merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to become the United States Coast Guard. All the stations in North Carolina were still active. That year, the crew at Station Cape Lookout gained notoriety for performing the newly created Coast Guard's first major shore-based rescue. During the pre-dawn hours of March 17, the three masted schooner *Sylvia C. Hall* ran aground on the shoals off the point of Cape Lookout. A terrible southeast gale was blowing with freezing winds reaching 40 knots and

continued...

US Life-Saving Service Stations of the Central North Carolina Coast *continued...*

seas topping 20 feet. Station Keeper Freddie G. Gillikin readied his crew who manned their motor lifeboat and made way to the wreck. The small craft moved in close to the schooner, but the waves proved too much, breaking over the boat, flooding the engine and nearly washing two men away. The Coast Guardsmen turned back, defeated mentally and physically; they had no choice but to wait for conditions to improve. The crew did not return to the beach though; they pulled away to deeper water where the seas were not breaking, keeping eyes on the schooner all the while. As night fell, the crew was ordered to shore, a devastating feeling for men trained to save people from these conditions.

The crew was up and readying their rescue craft before the sun even rose. This time they would tow the station

surfboat with the motor lifeboat to *Sylvia C. Hall*. The lighter oar-powered vessel would prove more effective through the waves than the bigger clunkier motorboat. The conditions had not improved much by the next morning though; waves were breaking over the schooner's deck. As the crew reached the scene, the surfboat was manned and released. Dancing across and through the breakers, the crew made two trips to rescue all six people from the doomed schooner. C. W. Sprague, captain of *Sylvia C. Hall*, penned a letter to head keeper Gillikin, thanking him and his crew for the valuable service they performed rescuing and caring for the survivors of his ship, "You deserve great praise and I shall not fail to do my part making it known." The same important efforts of the US Life-Saving Service continued, just under a different name. ■

Benjamin Wunderly is the curator of education for the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort.

Exhibit Changes Underway at the Museum

By Benjamin Wunderly



United States Life-Saving Service exhibit. NC Maritime Museum.

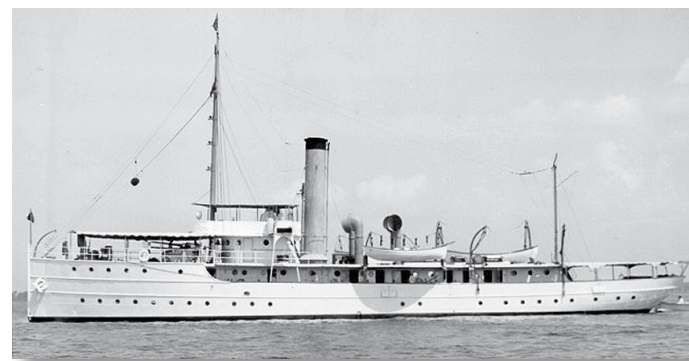


The metal life car was used to pull at least five or six adults from the shipwreck to the beach. NC Maritime Museum.

One of the longest running exhibits in the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort is slated for a well overdue facelift. *Soldiers of Surf and Storm* was originally installed in 1985, just after the museum moved from Turner Street to the current building on Front Street. The exhibit includes information that covers the United States Revenue Cutter Service, U.S. Lighthouse Service, and U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service, as well as their subsequent all-encompassing organization, the United States Coast Guard. About four years ago the exhibit was reduced in size, leaving only the segment on the United States Life-Saving Service on display. Considering the steep history associated with each of these pre-Coast Guard organizations, the task in 1985 to bring the stories to a combined exhibit was surely challenging. It will prove the same for the expected renovations to come. Museum staff will soon be busy compiling new information,

creating a dynamic design, fabricating casework, and putting it all together for a fresh look.

The revamped Coast Guard exhibit at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort will continue to focus on North Carolina's segment of the service's history. It will include background information on the early years of the pre-Coast Guard organizations in the state, as well as the places and people involved. At one point, North Carolina was home to 29 different Life-Saving Stations, at least 15 individual lighthouse structures, 12 anchored lightship stations, 17 screw pile lighthouses, and numerous revenue cutters. Today the U.S. Coast Guard operates stations at Elizabeth City, Oregon Inlet, Hatteras, Hobucken, Fort Macon, Emerald Isle, Wrightsville Beach, Oak Island, and, seasonally, Ocracoke.



U.S. Marine Revenue Cutter Pamlico was launched in 1907 and stationed at New Bern. Photo from United States Coast Guard.

With that extensive history and continued service, we don't need a better reason to give our exhibit a makeover! Look for changes to begin in late 2024.

Additional changes...

A ten-year-old exhibit in the museum lobby is also on the schedule for some remodeling. The lobby exhibit, *Fishing for Fun*, examines North Carolina's history of the recreational side of catching fish. The changes will include a new layout for part of the exhibit that will include various interactives to fill the space. Some of the original content will be retained, and new aspects will expand the information on the sport from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. We'll more closely examine the building of sportfishing boats and development of fishing tackle, including segments on the people who were involved. Exhibit staff will turn their focus to the recreational fishing exhibit once the work on *Soldiers of Surf and Storm* is completed.

If you have been to the museum recently you may have noticed that the temporary gallery exhibit on the history of the sport of surfing in North Carolina has been removed. *Riding the Right Coast: NC Surfing* was removed to make way for a future exhibit that will focus on the semi-quincentennial, or 250th anniversary, of the signing of the Declaration of



The current Fishing for Fun exhibit in the museum lobby. NC Maritime Museum.

Independence for America. The display will cover our state's coastal region during the late 1700s, focusing on the political, economic, and social conditions that existed. It will also include information on the coastal defenses and ports, privateering, and significant events that happened in the area during the war.

This exhibit is part of a larger statewide initiative called America250NC that commemorates North Carolina's part in the American Revolution. The North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, which the North Carolina Maritime Museum System falls under, began the multi-year initiative this past April; scheduled events across the state will culminate in July 2026. For more information about these educational opportunities visit America250.nc.gov.

Why do we change exhibits?

Good question! It's for several reasons, the simplest being that no museum is large enough to tell the complete story of North Carolina's maritime history, culture, and environment. To cover as much information as possible, we replace exhibits so different topics can take turns in the limelight. We also want to keep you coming back! We love repeat visitors; to entice people to return, we change things up from time to time. Lastly, history isn't static; new information often comes to light, and we want to keep our exhibits as accurate and informative as possible. We hope to see you in Beaufort soon! ■

Benjamin Wunderly is the curator of education for the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort.

Mark Your Calendar!

- Jun. 8 Maritime Day at Gallants Channel
- Jun. 8 Bricks Reception at Gallants Channel
- Jun. 10–Aug. 9 Junior Sailing Program
- Jun. 14 Boat Shoes & Bow Ties Fundraiser
- Jul. 6 Fireworks at Gallants Channel
- Jul. 19 Crab Cake Cook Off
- Aug. 2 Rally 'Round The Islands
- Oct. 4 Fall First Friday Artist Reception
- Oct. 6 NC Seafood Festival Regatta
- Oct. 12 Fall "In-The-Water" Meet
- Nov. 1 Fall First Friday Artist Reception
- Nov. 2 Boatshop Bash
- Dec. 7 Friends of the Museum Holiday Flotilla
- Dec. 8 Annual Membership Meeting
- Dec. 14 Beaufort Holiday Art Walk

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

Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in Hatteras

George Washington Creef Sr.'s Clandestine Operation during the Civil War

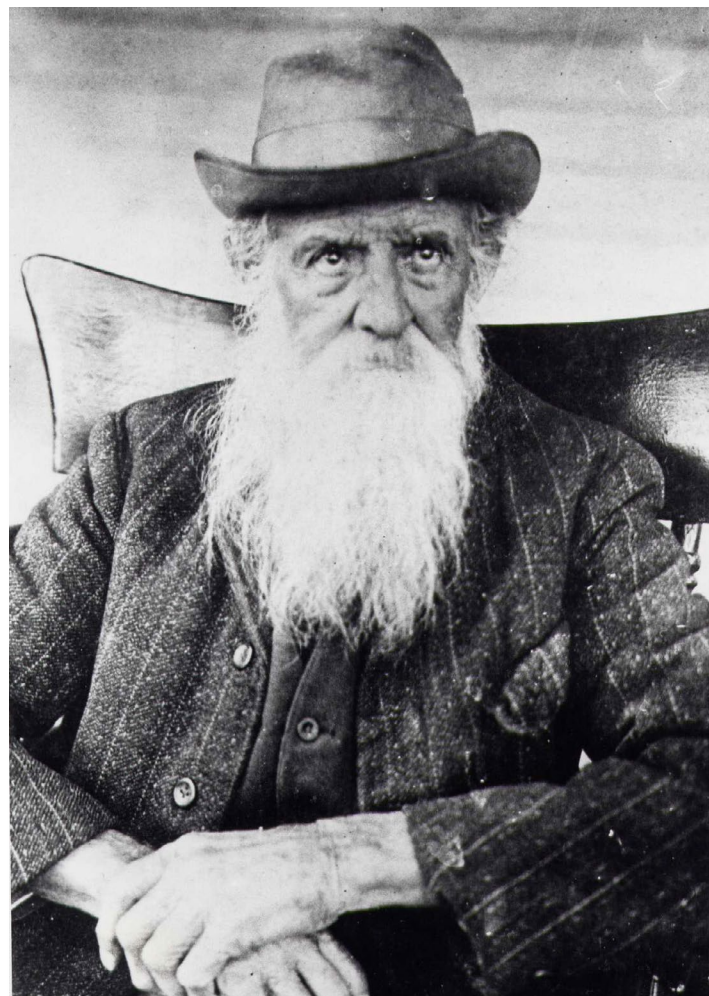
By David Bennett

George Washington Creef Sr. has gone down in history as the originator of the North Carolina shad boat. Much of his life outside of boatbuilding has either been forgotten or overlooked. While examining records from the National Archives, Maritime Historian David Bennett stumbled across sworn testimony made by George Washington Creef Sr. concerning the schooner W. W. Cherry. This testimony provides a brief window into Creef's life at the time of the war.

Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, George Washington Creef Sr. in his 30s worked as a master aboard the schooner *W. W. Cherry*, freighting shingles from Plymouth, North Carolina, to Norfolk, Virginia, and Baltimore, Maryland. This vessel, owned by Plymouth merchants William W. Brown and S. H. McRae, was built in Bertie County in 1850. It measured 75-feet long, 17.5-foot beam (width), and 59.5 tons.

Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, William Brown found himself on the wrong side of Confederate authorities. Brown, a Unionist, refused to muster for Confederate military service and was court martialed. However, he was cleared of all charges on a technicality. At the time, Confederate law excused vessel captains from military service. After the fall of Hatteras to Union forces, Brown lost his exemption, and he was eventually drafted by the Confederate Army. Loyal to the Union cause, Brown went on the run. Traveling north, in late January 1862, he parted ways with George W. Creef and schooner *W. W. Cherry* at South Mills, a small town off the Dismal Swamp Canal in North Carolina's Camden County. Before leaving Creef, Brown instructed him not to let his schooner fall into Confederate hands. At the time, Confederate forces were sinking vessels in Croatan Sound to prevent Union warships from reaching Roanoke Island.

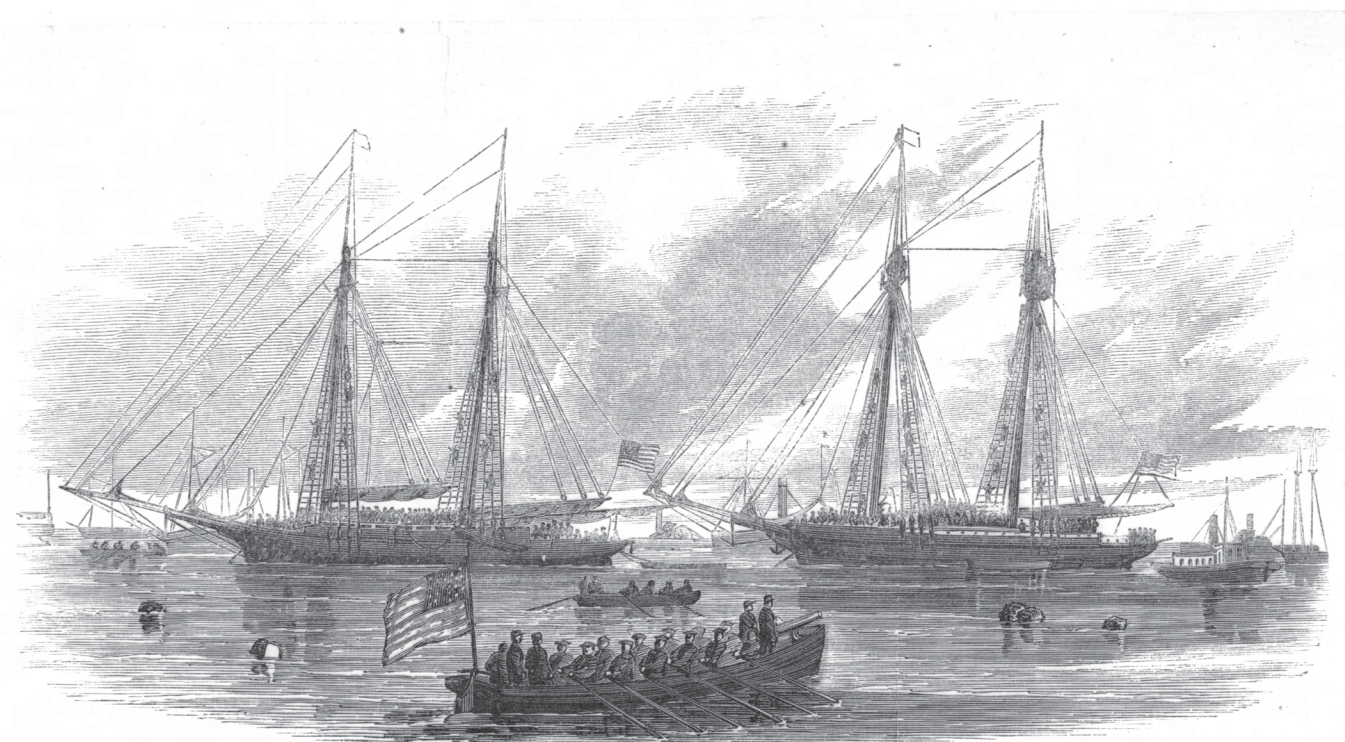
Creef, with the aid of Lemuel Basnight, sailed *W. W. Cherry* down the Dismal Swamp Canal and into the Pasquotank River. As they approached Sawyers Creek, they learned that Confederate soldiers were looking for the schooner. To evade sentries, Creef ran the vessel up into Sawyers Creek where they waited for nightfall. Under the cover of darkness, Creef came out of the creek and sailed



Photograph of George Washington Creef, circa 1900, almost 40 years after the events described in this article. North Carolina Maritime Museum.

quietly down the Pasquotank River undetected. When he reached the Albemarle Sound, he sailed south for the Alligator River. From the Alligator River, he proceeded to Hookers Gut where he concealed *W. W. Cherry*.

Shortly thereafter, Roanoke Island fell to Union forces. Creef proceeded overland to Caroon Point, near Roanoke Island, to find Union soldiers and report *W. W. Cherry*'s location. While Creef made his overland trek, Basnight



No. 524.—THE NATIONAL FLEET STEAMING THROUGH CROATAN SOUND—ROANOKE ISLAND IN THE DISTANCE, FEBRUARY 7.

Federal ships in Croatan Sound by Roanoke Island, February 1862.

Image from University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

guarded the schooner. When Creef finally contacted Union military authorities, they encouraged him to sail the schooner to Roanoke Island where he would continue to serve as master of the vessel, but in service to the United States government. Creef was apprehensive: "I told them that I was afraid that the Confederates would overtake and capture me and the vessel in coming out of the [Alligator] River. They replied that if that was the case they would go after the vessel, myself, and my family." When Creef returned to Hookers Gut the schooner was gone.

While Creef was looking for Union forces, the Union gunboat *Huzzah* arrived at the mouth of the Alligator River and sent a squad of soldiers in a launch to reconnoiter the creeks. The soldiers found the schooner with Basnight aboard. Basnight surrendered the vessel; and the next day, he piloted it to the mouth of the Alligator River where it was taken in tow by *Huzzah* to Roanoke Island.

When Creef returned to his house at East Lake, he found a note nailed to his door indicating that he would find the schooner at Roanoke Island in the possession of the Union Army. By the time Creef returned to Roanoke Island, *W. W. Cherry* had been towed to New Bern. Upon reaching New Bern, Creef finally found the schooner tied up along the waterfront. The Army had renamed the vessel *Gideon* and was refitting it to serve as a gunboat in Core Sound. When Creef made inquiries

concerning the vessel, he was told that the Army was in dire need of watercraft and they could not part with it; however, William Brown, the owner, would be compensated for the vessel.

George Washington Creef would go on to serve as a pilot for the Union military in North Carolina's waters aboard vessels similar to *W. W. Cherry*, such as the schooner *C. H. Culpepper*. He would never see *W. W. Cherry* afloat again. However, in March 1865, Creef did see the vessel wrecked, stripped bare, and abandoned along the sound side of Hatteras Island. According to Charles S. Odin, a mariner and fisherman from Hatteras, *W. W. Cherry/Gideon* sank at the Commissary Wharf on November 28, 1864, partially loaded with supplies.

William Brown, Creef's employer, returned to North Carolina when he felt it was safe for him. He spent the last two years of the war serving as a pilot aboard Union gunboats, such as USS *Massasoit*, in North Carolina's waters. He did not receive compensation for *W. W. Cherry* until years after the war. Compensation, however, amounted to less than half the vessel's value. To compound his loss, his home and properties in Plymouth, North Carolina, were destroyed during the Battle of Plymouth in 1864. ■

David Bennett is the maritime historian for the North Carolina Maritime Museum system.

Hatteras Redesign

By Cyndi Brown

All pictures courtesy North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

A wholesale renovation recently completed at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum was the first major redesign of the site since it opened more than two decades ago.

The museum first opened to the public in 2002, offering a glimpse into the rich maritime history of the North Carolina coast. Over the next 20 years, exhibits were updated and added; however, the public spaces

retained their basic footprints and overall designs. A significant \$4.2 million the state awarded to the museum in 2021—along with contributions from Dare County, the Outer Banks Visitors Bureau and others—finally changed that.

The remodeling process began in late 2022. The state had previously contracted with Riggs Ward Design to create a comprehensive design plan. Riggs Ward

collaborated with state staff members who specialize in maritime history—including exhibit designers, collections specialists and historians—in every step of the design process and the installation. This team helped shape the exhibit narratives and support those narratives with objects already in the Maritime Museums' collection, as well as procuring other objects to help tell a full and accurate history of our area.

As visitors step into the museum's lobby, they are greeted by a visually striking space, with a redesigned welcome desk relocated to the center of the room. The rooms off to the right after entering the lobby have been re-worked into a library/education space separate from the main gallery. A curved wall behind the desk helps separate the space and lead visitors into the gallery experience.

The entry to the gallery itself is through a shipwrecked hull that houses a brief film telling the story of the Graveyard of the Atlantic. The Monomoy surf boat that sat on display in the former space is now a show-stopping centerpiece of the gallery: Five life-sized U.S. Life-Saving Service crew members sit aboard, steering the vessel across artistically inspired wave forms. The first-order Fresnel lens from the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse that used to stand in the lobby has been moved to a pedestal that also houses a selection of artifacts recovered from various shipwrecks. The revamped museum also boasts an array of interactive experiences, from touch screens to holographic video displays, providing visitors with engaging ways to delve into the region's maritime heritage. Educational programming that enhances the main exhibits and allows visitors to explore new activities and ideas is being developed. And children, in particular, can enjoy scavenger hunts and tailored programs designed to both educate and entertain.

The Meekins Chandlery Gift Shop, located off the lobby, was also redesigned to add an entrance from the gallery directly into the shop. Outside, the familiar museum design remains unchanged, with the exterior evoking the timbers of a shipwreck and helping to inspire the interior redesign.

the region's shared history, and the redesigned space offers an exciting way to share them, explore more about the region and learn just what makes the North Carolina coast so unique. The objects on display, the interactive elements and the public programming work together to help connect the region's history to coastal life today. ■

Cyndi Brown is the public information officer for the North Carolina Maritime Museum system.

Salty Dawg Lecture Series 2024

The Salty Dawg Lecture Series will return this summer. Every Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. speakers will give a talk, presentation, or demonstration relating to maritime history in North Carolina. The series begins the first week of June and will run until the last Tuesday in August. ■



The reopening of the museum following the re-design marks the beginning of a new chapter for the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in exploring and celebrating the rich maritime heritage of the North Carolina coast. There are so many interesting stories that are a part of

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.

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ncmaritimemuseumbeaufort.com

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Sun. 12–5 p.m.



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graveyardoftheatlantic.com

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**North Carolina Maritime Museum
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