

Was Verrazzano Here?

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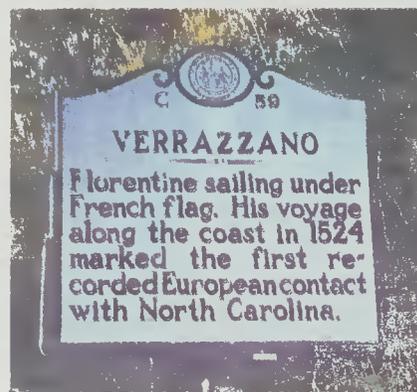


HISTORY STORIES

Reflections of Pine Knoll Shores

This is the first in a series of articles commemorating the 50th anniversary of Pine Knoll Shores. For more information about the town's interesting history, visit the History Committee's website at pineknollhistory.blogspot.com.

How far back can we trace the history of the section of Bogue Banks we know as Pine Knoll Shores? We have evidence that Native Americans camped and fished here, but the earliest recorded history of a westerner visiting may be when the explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano arrived in the 16th century.



—Photo by Susan Phillips

Giovanni da Verrazzano may or may not have made landfall in Pine Knoll Shores, but a letter he wrote to King Francis I of France, dated July 8, 1524, indicates that Verrazzano did sail along our coast. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources (NCDCCR) highway marker ID: C-59, on the corner of Highway 58 and Pine Knoll Boulevard, honors his passage.

Francis I, along with Italian merchants and French bankers, sponsored Verrazzano's navigational venture to find a north-west passage to Asia. Several years earlier,

Christopher Columbus and Ponce de Leon, both sailing in a similar search under the Spanish flag, had made famous landings in North America.

Verrazzano began his cross-Atlantic voyage with three vessels—the *Brittany*, the *Normandy* and the *Dauphine*—but only the *Dauphine* survived to make it to our shores. It's believed he first came to the tip of Cape Fear and continued up the coast to the Pine Knoll Shores section of Bogue Banks.

In his letter to the French King, Verrazzano described campfires along the coast. When he and his crew first came ashore, he marveled at what he saw:

The seashore is completely covered with fine sand XV feet deep, which arises in the forms of small hills about fifty paces wide. After climbing farther, we found other streams and inlets from the sea, which come in by several mouths, and follow the ins and outs of the shoreline. Nearby we could see a stretch of country much higher than the sandy shore, with many beautiful fields and plains full of great forests, some sparse and some

dense; and the trees have so many colors, and are so beautiful and delightful that they defy description.

Was he down by the mouth of the Cape Fear River or right here along the shores of Bogue Banks? Verrazzano also described a native population he and his crew encountered:

They go completely naked except that around their loins they wear skins of small animals like martens, with a narrow belt of grass around the body, to which they tie various tails of other animals, which hang down to the knees; the rest of the body is bare, and so is the head. Some of them wear garlands of birds' feathers. They are dark in color, not unlike the Ethiopians, with thick black hair, not very long, tied back behind the head like a small tail. As for the physique of these men, they are well proportioned, of medium height, a little taller than we are. They have broad chests, strong arms, and the legs and other parts of the body are well composed. There is nothing else, except that they tend to be rather broad in the face: but not all, for we saw many with angular faces. They have big black eyes, and an attentive and open look.

Are these early residents of Pine Knoll Shores? The North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources does consider the possibility that Verrazzano could be describing a coastal area further south: "Cases can be made for Brunswick and Onslow Counties as well as Carteret County. In recent years, in fact, a real estate development in the Cape Fear region has taken the name 'Landfall' for the event." But, in finally making the decision that Verrazzano was describing Bogue Banks, those working with the highway marker program relied heavily on one

important detail—specifically, Verrazzano's observation that after he and his crew made their first landing the coast "veered" eastward.

In the translation used to support the highway marker, Verrazzano is quoted as saying, "We departed this place still running along the coast, which we found to trend toward the east." And NCDCCR remarks, "In defense of the Pine Knoll Shores site in Carteret it is pointed out that the geographical landmass on Bogue Banks is the only spot along the explorer's route where the land 'trend[s]' toward the east."



Verrazzano's approximate route, coming ashore near Cape Fear in mid-March 1524.

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(Continued on page 27)