



HISTORY STORIES

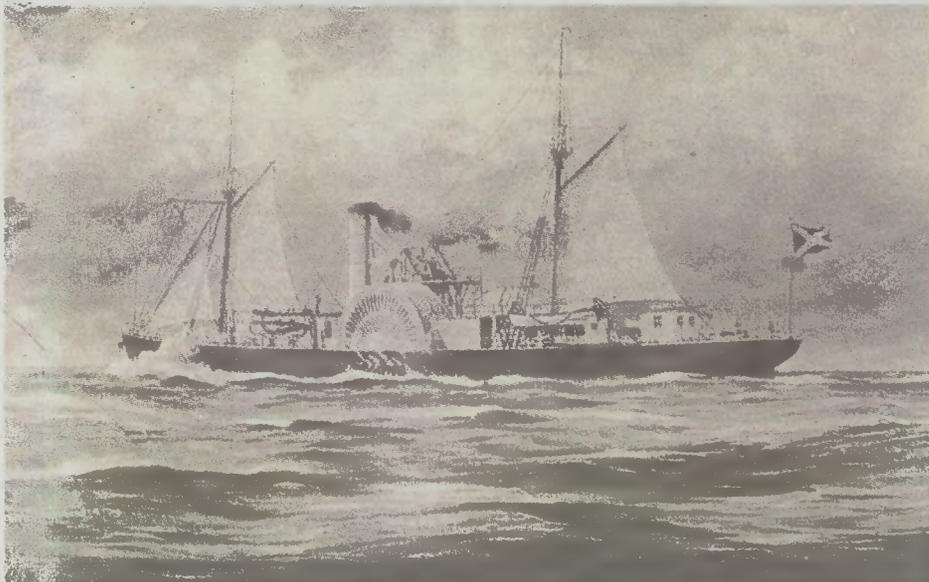
Reflections of Pine Knoll Shores

1864: What Happened on Our Shores?

By Barbara Milhaven and Phyllis Makuck

The next stop on the Pine Knoll Shores timeline is 1864, the year the S.S. *Pevensey*, a blockade runner serving the Confederacy, was run aground by the *New Berne*, a Union supply ship. The *Pevensey's* remains lie in the ocean about 100 yards off our beach, just east of the Iron Steamer public access area at 345 Salter Path Road. The wreck is so heavy and imbedded so deeply in sand that, according to David Moore, former nautical archaeology curator of the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort, "It isn't going anywhere."

The S.S. *Pevensey* was typical of the vessels used to run Union blockades during the Civil War. It was an iron-hulled, sidewheel steamer schooner rigged with one deck, two masts, a deck house, a round stern and five bulkheads. Shipwreck files from North Carolina's Underwater Archaeology Branch (UAB) give specifications as 543.07 gross tons, 210.4-foot length, 24.5-foot beam, 14.225-foot depth, with an average draft of 10 feet. She was built by Charles Lungley of London, circa 1863/1864, with machinery manufactured by Northam Iron Works of Southhampton, England. The sidewheel, a feathering type, 25



An artist drawing of the *Ella and Annie*, a Confederate blockade runner and sidewheel steamer, similar in design to the SS *Pevensey*.—Artwork by R.G. Skerrett, from Navy photo, 1900

feet in diameter by 8 feet in width, was designed to cause less noise and splash, minimizing detection as it traveled in the dark of night, and provide better use of the vessel's engine power.

So what happened? In the early morning hours of June 9, 1864, after three previous successful runs through the blockade from her home base in Bermuda, the *Pevensey* unwittingly passed her destination on the Cape Fear River. She contained cargo that was most likely intended to resupply Confederate troops at Fort Fisher or Fort Caswell near Wilmington, but she missed the entrance to the Cape Fear River, the route to both forts. Instead of the Cape Fear River, the *Pevensey* found herself farther north in the waters off the coast of Bogue Banks, heading northeast toward Union-occupied Beaufort.

Most of the east coast waters were patrolled by Union ships to keep the South from exporting and importing valuable goods and getting supplies to Confederate troops. Although necessary, navigating under cover of night must have been extremely difficult since the shoreline was mostly uninhabited, making it difficult to see landmarks. The captain and crew apparently miscalculated in the darkness and did not realize they had missed their Cape Fear destination. While traveling at a slow pace, the *Pevensey* was spotted and then chased by the *New Berne*. The *Pevensey* tried to distance herself from the pursuing ship by throwing cargo overboard to lighten the load, hoping to pick up speed. Unfortunately, the *New Berne* got close enough to fire shots, damaging and stopping the *Pevensey*.

Unable to continue, the *Pevensey*, with her crew of 36, turned north toward the shore and ran aground. The crew lowered auxiliary boats and made for the beach, with the exception of one left on board to set the ship's boiler to explode. Still thinking they were in the Wilmington area and near Confederate Fort Caswell, the crew headed out in search of the fort. Instead, they found Union Calvary troops, were captured and taken as prisoners to Union-occupied Fort Macon.

The *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of Rebellion* provide several accounts of the *Pevensey's* grounding and subsequent capture of the crew. US Naval Lieutenant T.A. Harris, aboard the *New Berne*, writes that the *Pevensey's* cargo contained "arms, blankets, shoes, cloth, clothing, lead, bacon and numerous packages marked to individuals" as well as tompons (weather protectors for Whitworth cannons), leading to speculation that there were guns (perhaps cannons) underneath the musket boxes. In a letter written home to his wife on June 12, 1864, US Navy Paymaster William Frederic Keeler gives an exciting eyewitness account that is worth the read. Keeler was aboard the *New Berne* at the time of the incident and later learned details of the crew's capture when he arrived back at Beaufort. These reports and other details about the *Pevensey* can be found at sidco.org/blockage-runner-s-s-pevensey.

So where exactly is the *Pevensey's* wreckage? She lies at N34 41'.458 W076 49'.644, at the site of the former Iron Steamer Fishing Pier. The pier and motel were sold in 2004 and demolished for residential development, making the location from the beach a little more difficult to pinpoint now without reference to the pier. In the past, at low tide, part of the wreck could still be seen from the beach and pier when the sea was calm and the water was clear. The short, angled extension on the east side of the long pier provided additional access to the wreck for fishing enthusiasts and sightseers alike.

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