

# Memories of Beaufort in the Nineties

By Thomas H. Carrow

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(This is the sixth in a series of sketches on Beaufort during the 1890's).

We lived across the street from Mr. Noe, and I was frequently around when he was butchering and attending to his stock. He bought a fine marsh pony that had never been bridled, and I was the first to ride him. Finally, he became well broke, and Mrs. Noe had him as sleek as an apple. One day I was out riding, and I noticed he stumbled. I told Mr. Noe, and on examination, he found a six penny up to the hilt in the pony's foot. He took the nail out, but the pony writhed in paroxysms of pain for a day or two and died of lockjaw. We both wept.

## XXII

### Transportation

Everything used by human beings, except air, has to be transported by one means or another. In no field has greater advancement been made than in transportation. It rarely occurs to one born after the turn of the century that prior to that time, he horse-drawn vehicle, the ox cart, the sail boat, and barges were the principal means; in fact, practically the only means of transportation employed in communities not connected with railroads. My recollections of Beaufort on this subject are not quite clear.

I judge that two-thirds of all merchandise reached town via the A. & N. C. R. R. to Morehead City and via boats from there to Beaufort. A number of boats were used for this purpose. I am not sure whether there was very much competition or not.

A colored man named Able Davis was captain of the clinker-built boat. He regularly operated between the railroad warehouse, which extended over the water at Morehead somewhat as it does now, and Beaufort. There was a derrick on the wharf which was used to lower or hoist the goods into or from the boat and one on the County Dock in Beaufort for the same purpose. Of course, Captain Able had a helper on his boat.

The S. M. Buckman, a two-masted sharpie, Capt. Frank Ellison and a crew of two or three, was also used in this service. The S. M. Buckman had an advantage, a block and tackle was strung on the masts to expedite unloading. When the freight was landed on the County Dock, the draymen picked it up and delivered it to the final destination, each drayman having his regular customers.

The principal commodities shipped from Beaufort were fish and clams. My recollection is that boats were especially engaged for this purpose and not the ones that brought the freight from Morehead City, which, as we say on the railroads, necessitated a lot of "empty movement."

There was also a boat line between Beaufort and New Bern. Captain Hall was the skipper, and one or two of his sons constituted the crew. One of his sons was named Dave. I have a faint recollection that he would include a jug of liquor in his cargo if requested to do so by "reliable" citizens. My recollection is that Captain Hall owned his boat, and that it was a sharpie type, a big one, with a jib and two sails. His schedule called for one round trip per week: a day to go, a day to upload and load, and a day to return, "laying" over in Beaufort the remainder of the week. (I recently made a round trip to New Bern in a motor boat in a few hours).

Capt. Jim Graham owned a farm eight or ten miles from Beaufort on Newport River. He had a big skiff-type boat with jib and mainsail that he designed and built. He used it to transport wood, watermelons, other farm products and very fine quality "moonshine." He was a Canadian, a fine gentleman and a warm friend of my father. He raised a fine family, many of whose offspring, I suppose, are citizens of Carteret.

Bogue Sound and Crab Point farmers brought their produce, mostly watermelons and cantaloupes to Beaufort in the smaller type boats, but I am not sure what type. I do believe some of them used canoes which were made from hollowed out trees.

Early in the nineties, the good ship Charles, a small two-masted vessel, would occasionally bring merchandise from Baltimore or other cities. I am not sure whether she was able to dock or whether she had to be lightered. It would be impossible to picture Beaufort in the early nineties without Captain John L. and the Charles and Charles Brag, his colored sailor.

Occasionally, vessels of considerable size would anchor in the channel near Fort Macon, more often "light" than not to await orders. It impressed me as a child to notice that large vessels always lay head to the tide regardless of the direction of the wind, whereas shallow bottom boats would lie head to the wind, regardless of the tide.

I recall very distinctly a three-masted vessel lying peacefully in the Fort Channel while being unloaded. Her cargo was natural ice from the state of Maine for Beaufort fish dealers. The ice was unloaded from the vessel onto smaller boats and then brought to the County Dock in Beaufort. A narrow boardwalk was constructed from the dock to the ice house across the street just east of the Lipman Store Corner. The colored men would push the ice on the walk across the street where it was hoisted into the ice house and packed in saw dust. From there, it was distributed to the fish dealers as required. Every pound that was used was crushed with a wooden maul. Manufactured ice took the place of natural ice and shortly before or after 1890, the ships from Maine were seen no more.

It is worth while recalling that the fish industry was always and is now dependent upon ice and the expansion of the fish business was largely dependent upon the expansion of the ice business and the facilities for transporting ice.

There were, of course, a great many other boats engaged in carrying all types of freight to and from all quarters, particularly wood for fuel. For example, there was a lone steam boat that was connected with a saw mill at Stella which occasionally brought a load of lumber or slab wood to Beaufort. I remember the short, pudgy, genial captain, but I am unable to recall his or the boat's name.

It seems to me that prior to 1890 "flat" boats were used extensively. They were of the small vessel type with no deck. They had a wide walkway from stem to stern along the gunwale on each side, and the crew with 15 to 18 foot poles would push them along in calm weather, walking from head to stern, pushing the boat, and leisurely walking forward to start all over again.

On Saturdays, in good weather, there was always a number of sail skiffs and a few canoes moored to the docks connected with the several stores on Front Street. They came empty from



CARING FOR THE LITTLE ONES  
Many of the Negro cooks during the author's teen-age days also cared for children of the families for whom they worked. Here Charlotte Gaston, cook, dandles Dorothy Jones, Mrs. Julia Jones' daughter, on her knees.

Harkers Island, the Straits, east North River, and other points east to load up with groceries and other merchandise for home consumption.

## XXIII

### Whales and Wrecks

Being near the sea, we children heard many stories about whales, how big they were and how high they could blow the water into the air on rising to the surface, not to mention the battle they would put up when harpooned. It was therefore an important event when the news spread in Beaufort one day that a whale had been captured and landed on the banks opposite Wade Shore.

I happened to get an opportunity to see the whale, having joined a party who journeyed to the scene for this purpose. We witnessed the carving of the carcass and saw it rendered into oil—a rare sight for a child. My recollection is that the proceeds from the whale netted the fishermen some \$1800 which was big money in the nineties. That was the only whale that was caught near Beaufort during my time.

Ever since the sail was invented and developed for ocean going vessels, there have been shipwrecks. Seafaring is necessarily an intermittent battle with the elements. The probabilities of wrecks during severe storms provides a fruitful subject for conversation for people living along the ocean. Thus, during heavy weather, it was common practice to survey the ocean with a spy glass from the docks. It was really a thrill to see the topmast of a vessel heave in sight and then discover she had weathered the storm. In one instance, the good ship was not so lucky. A black three-masted Norwegian bark was obliged to cut away her masts but managed to weather the storm otherwise. Being disabled, she was towed into port and anchored in Newport River not far from the railroad pier in Morehead City. There she remained for a year or so, a lonely spectacle, a mere ghost of a ship that provoked innumerable commentaries. I am unaware of what finally happened to her.

My impression is that the original fatback boats were small two masted vessels of the schooner type, 70 or 80 feet in length. They were sturdy craft and could weather a storm almost as well as the big vessels. I remember two very distinctly. They were named the Convoy and the Alert. A negro man, Charles Nelson, a very fine character, was captain of one of the fatback boats. He went out with his boat one day and was caught in a storm. His boat became dismasted, and she drifted about on the sea for days but was finally sighted, and the crew was rescued by another boat. I loved to hear Captain Charles tell of his experience, how he expected every wave would sink his ship, and how after the fresh water gave out, his crew was approaching starvation when the Lord answered his prayer. He had a resonant voice and an ample vocabulary of its kind. His narration was exciting.

Scarcely a year passed that there was not a wreck or two off Cape Hatteras, but that was so far away that it made little impression upon us other than to keep us reminded of the ravages of the sea, an important fact since there was scarcely any time when some of our people were not on the sea.

Mr. Harry Pierce, a young man of Beaufort, the brother of the late Mr. Will Pierce, shipped as mate on a vessel that disappeared, and neither the vessel nor any member of the crew was ever heard from again.

When I was less than 10 years old, the late Captain John Beveridge was a young sea captain. He lived near my father's store on back landing. His homecoming was always an event because he would tell us all about his experience, the storms he weathered, the cities he had visited, and the cargoes he carried.

There was a sea captain named Sam Howland. He was full of humor, and the boys loved his stories of the sea. He was an expert navigator, but for what reason I do not know, he preferred to ship as mate rather than captain. Thus, Captain Joe Gaskill, with Captain Sam Howland, as mate, ran the two masted schooner, The Champion for some time. Captain Sam was a Confederate soldier, and he liked to join the parades on Decoration Day. I recall playing the flute in one of the parades in which he participated. Not much music, just enough to keep time by.

## XXIV

### Making a Livelihood

I have always been interested in the means people employ to make a livelihood. The subject has tremendous ramifications. In the first place, in every community there are not only the people who will not work, but also those who are willing and anxious to work, but for whom work is not available, or, what is often worse, the work available brings wholly inadequate and often no income, as farming or fishing in bad seasons.

The percentage of invalids and aged people of Beaufort was as great before the close of the century as now, perhaps somewhat

greater. I am very sure that the percentage of able bodied people unemployed was, on the average, much greater. The principle reason was that there was not then as much opportunity for work as now, but regardless of the reasons, the percentage of people who had no regular income was much greater than today. It is my impression that quite a number of citizens who were of the more affluent families prior to the Civil War, lost their fortunes as a result of the war and its aftermath.

It is infrequent that a man divested of a fortune, even a small one, is able to recoup it. There are exceptions, but they are rare. Hence, there were scions of some of the old families who were non-productive and therefore had a precarious existence. But aside from these, the matter of making a livelihood was a hard problem.

There were scores of people who wanted to work for whom work was not always available. Fishing and farming were already overmanned. Carpentry was well supplied. Boating had more people in it than the demand required, and the field of merchandizing was more than amply filled. Thus, some of the young fellows like my brother Claude took to the sea and others like myself repaired to other parts to earn a living, while still others like my brother Charlie remained in Beaufort.

In all human experience, nothing impresses me more than the luck, good or bad, that attends the decision of a young person in selecting or having thrust upon him his life's work. Even in the professions, the particular "line" or specialty a man follows is more often than not fortuitous. In my own case, I would not have come to Philadelphia if my brother had not asked me, I would not have connected with the Pennsylvania Railroad if an acquaintance had not advised me how to do so, and I would not have been selected for the particular job on which I have happily worked for 40 years if I had not made the acquaintance of a man early in life who selected me.

As I remember, a large percentage of Beaufort men, both young and old, had no continuous income for fishing and farming were both uncertain and only a few were able to make these vocations really pay. A few merchants did comparatively well, but many did not. I recall a Mr. Dickinson of Harlowe or Core Creek, a man who had lost a leg in the Civil War, saying that he was "land poor," meaning that his return from his ample acres was too meager to provide what he required.

These observations are emphasized by experience in my father's grocery store. Many of his customers were on credit, and he had great difficulty in making the business a success. That's why he decided to run for Recorder of Deeds. His income, including fees, was less than \$100 per month from his job, which was about the maximum in salaries. My recollection is that Mr. Winfield Chadwick, the richest man in Beaufort at that time, made only \$125 per month as President of the A.&N.C.R.R. although he had other income at the time. He was an astute businessman and a clever politician.

(To Be Continued)

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