The Recreational Fishery in South Carolina: The Little River Story

Educational Report 19

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Introduction

Little River was the first permanent settlement in Horry County and dates back to the late 1600s. It is situated on the North Carolina - South Carolina border and has always had a strong maritime tradition. First as a source of seafood for Indian tribes of the region and then for subsequent settlers. Next it was an important terminus for sailing ships bringing in supplies for the surrounding area, chiefly from Wilmington, N.C. in the 1800s and early 1900s. Lumber and naval stores were the major exports during this era, with some cotton and oysters being shipped around the turn of the century. A fish factory also operated out of Little River in the early 1900s, processing the catch of the purse seiner Prince (Floyd 1996, Gragg 1994, Lewis 1988 a,b,c,d, U.S. Dept Commerce 1920).

People from surrounding communities came to Little River to fish and enjoy other water activities such as swimming and sightseeing. Some camped on the bluff along the water front. This became a very popular site and in 1925 Lucian Bryan built a hotel. This has turned out to be the only water front hotel ever located at Little River and has always been referred to as "The Hotel."

As Little River became a vacation spot, other industry was dying out. In 1918 the boiler at the Hammer lumber mill which was the largest in the area blew-up killing five people (Berry 1977). It eventually closed putting many out of work. In the early 20's the oyster factory closed probably due to poor markets and short supply of cheap oysters and labor. The cotton gin closed about this time as did the fish factory (Horry Herald 1922). The naval store industry suffered as demand for their products fell off also, limiting job opportunities further. About this time some of the local men began to carry people fishing, first in row boats and then in power boats, probably due to some extent to the drop off in industry, but also as a result of increased presence of vacationers. This was the first organized offshore recreational fishing in South Carolina where a group of boats carried people fishing for a fee (Gragg 1994) (Lewis 1988).

When the men and boys at Little River began to take people fishing can not be dated exactly, but probably it began in the early 1920s. River parties were the first to be carried out. Some were taken in boats rowed by the guide. The former crew boat for the Hammer Lumber Company was used by Lawrence and Jerome Long to carry river parties in the '20s.

Deep sea parties were first organized by Bob and Les High, Liston Thomas and probably Rob Mintz. Victor Cox joined the group shortly thereafter. Bob High's first boat was the Eugenia and he began carrying people to the blackfish banks in 1923.

An article in the Horry Herald gives an account of a party's catch, fishing out of Little River in 1925 (Horry Herald 1925). Several of the early crafts were open boats that had no shelter for the fishermen. They were powered by one or two cylinder gas engines of very low horsepower. Many boats came into the fishery in the late '20s and through the '30s, but they were owned and operated by a small group of captains.

Important Events in Development of Little River Recreational Fishery

Many people were first attracted to the South Carolina coast prior to World War I by haul seine fisheries located near Futch's Beach, which is now East Cherry Grove Beach (C.B. Berry, 1996a). The earliest operators were Mr. Lucian Bryan and a Mr. Nixon.

The development of Myrtle Beach in the teens and early twenties by Mr. Simeon Chapin and John T. Woodside probably led to people seeking another pastime as they became aware of the coast. Certainly early realtors noted the availability of recreational fishing nearby as they spoke to pro-

The Little River waterfront in 1948, looking south. The docks are to the left. Note the unpaved road. (from an old postcard courtesy of V Kinlaw)
spective buyers (Lewis 1988a). And as mentioned earlier by 1923 enough people were visiting Little River that a few local boatem began to offer fishing trips to the nearshore Blackfish banks.

As more people came to the area and demand increased, better boats were sought to appeal to potential customers so the open boats soon were replaced with those having canopies and cabins for protection from sun and weather. The marine head (toilet) also more than likely was a further creature comfort introduced into the fishery in the late '20s.

The intracoastal waterway was begun in the late '20s and completed in 1936 (Lewis 1988c). Construction of this project led to more people coming into the area to work. These laborers from other places needed housing and board. Places catering to them also were available to fishermen and vacationers. One boarding house was operated by Mrs. Samuel G. Vereen (Mrs. Kate). Mr. Sam Vereen also provided rental row boats for fishermen. Hugh McGinn rented his skiffs to fishermen and to the Corps of Engineers to use to survey the waterway when they began their work in the area. He later worked for the Corps as a survey party member. The waterway when completed in 1936 also changed the tidal flow through the Little River Inlet, seemingly to make it’s changes in location more erratic (Megivern 1996).

When an inlet is in the process of moving it is often shallower until the inlet stabilizes and this makes it difficult for all boats, especially those with deeper drafts. This restricted the types of boats that could efficiently be employed in the fishery until some improvements were made to stabilize the inlet.

Another big event in the fishery was the advent of the Josephine in the early '30s, captained by Lawrence Long. She was longer, finer, and prettier than any boat yet to carry parties. She carried 49 people for $1.00 per head. This greatly increased the fame of Little River as customers extolled the virtues of her after returning home. In the late '30s the Josephine was hired to go up the Pee Dee River to Mars Bluff, S.C. near Florence to pick up campers for a session at the YMCA Camp Nixon located at Cherry Grove Beach. This further enhanced her reputation.

On 18 May 1941, the Nightingale, a 48 foot twin engine yacht converted to a headboat blew up killing seven of 39 passengers. The Nightingale owned and piloted by Douglas Sebastian had recently been repowered with Buick automobile engines and fuel problems led to the explosion. The Edward captained by Victor S. Cox and the Cadet captained by Rob Mintz rescued most of the passengers and all of the crew. A group of soldiers on the Cadet went into the water and were responsible for saving many of the people. The crew, none of whom was hurt, was Capt. Sebastian, Donnie Mintz, engineer, Leroy Mintz (12 years old at the time) mate. Word of this tragedy led to a great drop-off in the number of head boat fishermen this last summer before World War II. Accidents such as these finally in the mid 1950s led to much more stringent licensing and safety regulations required for party boats and captains (U.S. Dept. Commerce 1956).

World War II closed the recreational fishery as no boats were allowed to take parties offshore, only shrimpers were permitted to work inshore off Little River. The end of World War II allowed party fishing to resume. However, offshore recreational fishing did not boom at first. The boats had to be replaced. Capt. Rob Mintz rebuilt the Cadet as the Sea Rambler and used her for shrimping and Victor S. Cox brought in a sailboat the Ray Stubbs to carry parties. Lawrence Long sold the Josephine shortly after the war. As life returned to normal and people had more time for vacations the fishing picking up and more boats began to be added to the fleet. Mr. Luther Wilson brought in the Helen Jean and the Johnnie Jr. Mary Juel who had bought the hotel and its docks acquired the Martha Ann. About 1947 Frank Juel bought the first of several 63 foot war surplus air sea rescue boats. Vivian Bessent in part-
The first Helen Jean prior to 1954. At this time she was 55 feet long. After Hurricane Hazel she was lengthened to 65 feet. (postcard courtesy of V. Kintlaw)

Vivan Bessents' first Rascal. She was a World War II air sea rescue boat converted for bottom fishing. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

The Hobby owned by VG Burrell captained by Victor S. Cox. This was an example of gasoline powered boats that after the 1956 law changes became charter boats restricted to carrying 6 or less passengers. (photo from the author)

A promotional postcard sponsored by the Little River Improvement Association. (card courtesy of Mrs. T.V. Bessent)

The Hobby owned by VG Burrell captained by Victor S. Cox. This was an example of gasoline powered boats that after the 1956 law changes became charter boats restricted to carrying 6 or less passengers. (photo from the author)

Vivan Bessents' first Rascal. She was a World War II air sea rescue boat converted for bottom fishing. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

Sam Gardner's Ocean Queen in the early 1950s. This was an 84 foot air sea rescue boat converted for recreational fishing. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

The Hobby owned by VG Burrell captained by Victor S. Cox. This was an example of gasoline powered boats that after the 1956 law changes became charter boats restricted to carrying 6 or less passengers. (photo from the author)

On 15 October 1954, Hurricane Hazel, packing 115 mph winds, hit Little River head on. A tidal surge exceeding 15 feet wrecked docks, boats and shore facilities. No lives were lost, but everyone had to scramble to get ready for the next season (Taylor 1954). Only two boats were serviceable after the storm (Myrtle Beach News 1954a). This led to further upgrading of the boats and crowds looking to go fishing were back in force in 1955.

About this time the U.S. Congress passed the Merchant Marine Act of 1956. The "Ray Bill" as it was called, placed more safety requirements on operators and vessels carrying people for hire. The rules applying to vessels carrying over six people were so strict it made it almost impossible for a gasoline powered boat to meet them (U.S. Dept. Commerce 1956). This led most of the smaller boats at Little River to become charter boats carrying six or less people. Trolling for pelagic gamefish then became a more important component of recreational fishing.

In the mid '50s, Ralph Ellis tried to get all the party boat owners to join together to mount a campaign to promote business. He succeeded for a short while and many more fishing customers were attracted to Little River.

Sometime in the mid-to-late fifties, boats specifically constructed for charter and party work began to come into the fleet. Prior to this nearly all, if not all, of the boats had seen prior service as tugs, shrimp boats, yachts, military craft and other types of workboats.

In the early-to-mid fifties Frank Juel initiated "Gulf-stream" fishing on the snapper-grouper banks. Several boats became involved. Some would fish the blackfish banks on a day trip and then after cleaning up and a short nap by the crew, head back to modernize the fleet.

In the mid '50s, Ralph Ellis tried to get all the party boat owners to join together to mount a campaign to promote business. He succeeded for a short while and many more fishing customers were attracted to Little River.
Frank Juel and a party after returning from an overnight rip to the Gulf Stream. Frank is at the extreme right. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

V. G. Burrell, Jr.: The Recreational Fishery in Little River, South Carolina

off shore for a 20 to 24 hour excursion. Frank Juel bought an aluminum hull crew boat from oil interests in the Gulf of Mexico in the mid-sixties. This was named the Hurricane. She was powered with two V-12 GM diesels and cruised at about 22 knots. This permitted one-day trips to the offshore fishing grounds.

A very significant thing happened in the recreational fishery in the late sixties. Frank Juel initiated half-day fishing trips on the Tradewinds to the inshore blackfish banks. This was a 55 foot boat that carried about 45 people at $6.00 per person. Captained by Joe Elliott, she was fast at about 20 knots and could leave the docks and be fishing in an hour. This was the beginning of the end of the dominance of "meat" fishermen in the blackfish party business and really probably was a beginning of change in attitude of most all sport fishermen who thought that you had to catch enough to partly offset your expenses. Half-day parties were accepted for several reasons including those mentioned above. Families vacationing at the beach could enjoy an ocean outing for the whole family for a reasonable sum, and the catch was not too important because lodging facilities often did not provide cooking or means for keeping fresh caught fish. Boats were fast enough to get to and from the inshore reefs in a half-day and allow enough fishing time to satisfy most fishermen. Once the jet-ties were in place, in 1983, boats could cross the bar at any time of day. A family could have an outing without taking up an entire day and coming back worn out from a full day at sea. Gradually the half-day trips came to dominate the blackfish party business.

Trolling or "charter" boats were generally concentrating on Spanish mackerel, blue fish, king mackerel, dolphin, some cobia, bonita, and a few little tuna up to the early sixties. Boats and captains who wintered in Florida, taking a cue from the sport fishery there, began around 1960 to rig out for sailfish and other large pelagics and the fishery then included big game fishing boats along with the "inshore" trolling boats. The period 1955 to 1975 marked the heyday of the Little River recreational fishery. More people sought out the recreational fishing opportunities at Little River to satisfy their hankering for a good catch of fish than anywhere else in S.C. Boats and facilities operated at full capacity from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Trailerable outboard powered boats were becoming quite common in the sixties. Boats constructed of fiberglass reinforced resin made it possible to use heavier, more powerful outboard engines and move them on trailers up and down the highway without shaking the boat transom loose. Many of these boats began to use Little River inlet to get into the ocean. Others fished in the river. The outboard component was a consideration of the fishery when concerns about condition of the fish stocks arose.

Private sportfishing boats were docked at Vereens Marina about four miles above Little River waterfront, as well as a couple at Little River. These boats on occasion took parties to help pay upkeep and provide more income for captains who maintained and ran the boat for the owners. These were modern, well fitted out vessels and this put pressure on the regular charter boat owners to upgrade their boats and services to compete. So the older, less appealing, low cost boats were slowly replaced by the more costly, higher tech, speedier fiberglass manufactured vessels.

Arthur Smith of country singing fame initiated a King Mackerel Tournament in 1977 held at Little River. This annual event became highly successful by bringing in a large number of boats and anglers. Families and friends accompanying participants added to the positive economic impact in the area. This tournament was expanded to Murrells Inlet in 1983 and Charleston in 1992. While just at Little River, most fishermen came from South and North Carolina (about 90%). By 1982, as many as 888 boats participated. All the Little River charter boats took part in the competition but only made up four percent of the fishermen involved. The majority of the participants used their own boats or were guests on other boats. The tournament was discontinued in 1993 (Smith and Moore, 1980, Moore 1984). Most of the party boat operators at Little River welcomed the tournament in the beginning but became disenchanted as it began to attract a more professional clientele. Local captains felt highly financed groups had an unfair advantage over the strictly amateurs who were the initial competitors in the tournament.

Concern about the dangers of the Little River "bar" probably dated back to the time the first sailing vessels crossed it, as it was shallow, changeable and subject to a real wicked following sea (C. Berry, 1996b). An early victim was the steamer Sanders. It went aground and was lost in 1907 (Lewis, 1988c, Megivern 1996). Ralph Ellis, a one time postmaster, legislator, real estate entrepreneur and
always champion of Little River and it's fishing community started trying to get the Federal Government to construct jetties at the inlet before World War II. He recalled correspondence with Senator Olin B. Johnson in 1942 in which the Senator said there was no need to build the jetty project. Ralph persisted and finally the matter was resolved in 1970 when the jetty project became a reality. This allowed deep draft vessels to transit the bar on any tide.

The People and Their Boats

Capt. Bob High had a succession of boats starting with the above mentioned Eugenia. He purchased a double ender aptly named the Doublerender. She was powered by a Minimus 8 horsepower make or break engine. This type of engine had no reverse gear and was stopped or backed down by cutting off the ignition until the fly wheel had rocked back after making its last forward revolution and then connecting the ignition back so it started running in reverse. This operation took quite a deft touch and sometimes caused a pretty abrupt stop when the reverse didn't catch and the boat rammed the dock.

Bob also in the 1920s owned the Hammer, the former crew boat for the lumber mill. In 1935 he bought the Mud Turtle, a 27 ft. motor sailer which was fished in the river by Olin Williamson. It was called the Mud Turtle because at low tide it's slip ebbed out and she lay in the mud. It was powered by a one cylinder Palmier engine. Bob and Junior McCorsley bought the Acry Horton around this time and used her as a party boat. Bob replaced the Acry Horton with the David K. This boat had a shrimpmer hull and was powered by a 30 hp, three cylinder Bridgeport engine. Next came the Clyde Jr. which was a Harker Island built boat (U.S. Treasury Dept. 1945). She was first powered with a straight eight Buick automobile engine and then with a six cylinder Chrysler Crown. Just before the war he ran the Eva Mae for Hugh McGinn and after World War II he bought the Molly a twin screw boat. He kept her a short time and sold her to Vivian Bessent. His last boat was the Bennie Lane. At first he and Donnie Mintz owned her together and they shrimpmed in the fall and carried parties in the summer. Bob bought out Donnie and eventually he was used entirely as a party boat. She was 45 ft. long and powered with a Chrysler Crown. Bob retired in 1966.
The particulars of his boats are not well known, but he owned or operated the Pearl, the Water Lily, the Loaf Along and for many years the Edward which he bought in 1925. Capt. Victor called the Edward an open built boat. That meant she leaked considerably. Jennings Vereen, one of the mates, said he had pumped the Atlantic Ocean through her seven times. It was said that the mate, Red Fulwood, sometimes slept on the boat with his foot in the bilge and when the water reached his foot he would wake up and pump her out. Bob High's son, Edward, recalls Capt. Victor painting the Edward red and Capt. Victor sang out a ditty: "A little powder and a little paint will make people think what she is - is what she ain't." The Edward was about 48 ft. long and gas powered with a 35 hp Lathrop gasoline engine (U.S. Treasury Dept 1945). He initiated moon light cruises with the Edward and he operated it until he went back into the service in WW II.

After the war, Capt. Victor ran a 50 foot sailboat, the Ray Stubbs for about two years. This boat belonged to his brother-in-law, James S. Abdullah of Southport, N.C. (U.S. Treasury Dept 1945, 1955) Then for a period he worked the hill, that is, he met cars and booked parties for some of the headboats. In 1951 he began to run the Hobby which was his own boat. He ran her until his son Victor Earl Cox took over in the late 50's. The Hobby was 41 X 12 X2.5 feet. She was powered with a Chrysler 3.7 liter and was the first private work in the river.

Captain Mintz also had several river boats. One was a 26 footer with a canopy called the "Pop Pop" because of the sound of the one cylinder Palmier "make or break" engine. His last boat from this time until he became Ill was the Little Joe. She was about 30-32 ft long and powered by a Continental Red Wing engine. Captain Rob passed away in 1957. Captain Rob had a keen sense of humor, and many of his jokes or pranks are recalled by those who knew him. One day a group of apparently very prosperous and self important men drove up to the waterfront and demanded to know where the big boats were. Captain Rob directed them back to Highway 17 and told them to head north and they would see the big boats on their right. He did not mention the fact that he was referring to the US Navy "moth ball" merchant fleet anchored at Wilmington, NC some 55 miles distant.

Some ladies were admiring the very large oak tree that dominates the river front at the end of Mineola Avenue and observed it must be very old. Captain Rob very seriously remarked to them, "It, I was just a boy when it was planted."

Captain Rob's father was a pioneer fisherman in the area, fishing haul seine on the beach and in the river and Captain Rob himself ran a haul seine fishery at Cherry Grove and Mattis Island. Captain Rob's sons also followed in their footsteps. Lacy, the eldest, worked on tugs and dredges for awhile, but also operated private yachts for business people; one was owned by ex-Senator Jim Waaraier. Marc, the other, owned the party boats Victory and Bob Dan. One of Lacey's sons, Danny, works as relief captain on the Pride of the Carolinas. He has at one time or another worked on the Hurricane both for Frank Juel and Steve Speros. He first mated on the Rascal for Vivian Bessent when he was 12 years old. Lacy's other son Bob Dan, is in the party business running the Seabreeze. He bought his uncle Donnie's boat the Touchdown. In 1982 he bought the 75 foot Tim Allen in Florida until 1987. Then he got back into the party business in 1980 when he bought the Windjammer from his brother, Bobby. He was 50 feet long and powered by a 332 gm. He ran the boat under the Touchdown. In 1982 he bought his uncle Donnie Mintz's Bon Jon. He fished her until she burned in 1991. He now has his own marine survey company and looks back fondly on his coming up in the party boat fishery.

Lawrence Long was the very last of the early party boat skippers. He began in the mid '20s by taking river...
V.G. Burrell, Jr.: The Recreational Fishery in Little River, South Carolina

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parties with his brother Jerome, on the Hammer, the crew boat of the Hammer brothers lumber mill. She was 26 feet long and powered by a 7 hp Minimus gasoline engine. They would charge what they could get from one dollar up for a trip. His best remembered boat was the Josephine.2 She was 60x15x4 feet and powered by a 30 hp Fairbanks Morse diesel. His uncle owned the boat at first and let Lawrence run it for half the profit. Lawrence said he made a lot of money for his share the first year which was in the early thirties. It carried 49 passengers at $1 each. Lawrence advertised that he went with one or 49 at $1 per head, and Billy John Vereen recalls going one day with one paying fare when he got $2 as mate.3 This did not happen often and Lawrence, after buying the boat from his uncle for $400, captained the best known party boat at Little River. Other captains on the shore spoke of the Josephine as the Queen Mary of the Little River fleet and she was known throughout North and South Carolina as being bigger and better than anything afloat.4 The Josephine was sold in 1946 to be used as a freight boat.5 Captain Long next ran the Helen Jean for Vance Kinlaw6 and then the Joy, a trolling boat, for Frank Juel.7 In the late '50s he built a trolling boat, the Cheryl Ann.8 It was 45 ft long and powered by a GM 671. He fished her until 1979 when he retired. The Cheryl Ann served as a floating part of Wayne Henderson's restaurant on the waterfront until she burned and was put on the hill in 1997. Captain Long passed in 1998 at 93 years of age.

Lawrence instilled the love of the water in his sons and now the Long name is still prominent on the Little River waterfront. Larry, the eldest, has appropriately named his boats the Black Fish. He carries charter parties in the summer and fall and he fishes traps for black sea bass in the late fall and winter. Now he more or less specializes in shark fishing parties and has a thriving business. He started this in the early eighties and sometimes makes two trips a day. His latest Black Fish is about 45 ft long and powered by a 600 hp Detroit Diesel. Another son, Billy Long, operates the Billy Boy, a trolling boat and headboat that is also used for commercial fishing. Ricky Long runs the Double R and Tommy the Captain Vick. A grandson, Larry's son Chris, also operates a charter/commercial vessel the Longway.9,10,11,12 Bill and David Clemons need to be addressed together as they worked very closely with one another. Bill the older brother fished on the Cadet for Rob Mintz. He was on a familiarization trip to take over as captain of the Cadet when she came to the aid of the Nightingale when she blew up.13 David started out mat- ing on the Edward and the Cadet. He also worked on the Eva Mae when Bill Bessent owned her. Bill and David bought the Eva Mae from Bill Bessent in the early 1950s. She was used mostly for party fishing, but a couple of times she was used for shrimping in the fall. They fished her until they went to work for Vance Kinlaw in the middle fifties, Bill on the Helen Jean and David on the Johnnie Jr.14 After Bill's death, David took over the Helen Jean and ran her even after the Kinlaws sold her in the early '60s. He retired from boat operating in 1985 and now operates a successful tackle shop that caters to the fishing fleet.15

The Eva Mae needs special mention because of her interesting involvement with several people. Hugh McGinn bought her in 1940 for $450. Donnie Mintz shrimped her one year and made Hugh back the money he paid for her. Bob High fished her the next year and sent Hugh a goodly sum. Bill Bessent bought her next for $750 and kept her until he sold her to the Clemons for $1500.16,17 They fished her until they went to work for Vance Kinlaw. She probably caught more Spanish mackerel than any boat fishing out of Little River. Bill and David brought in the top catch more often than nearly all the other operators put together. For a long time they held the one day record for bringing in 565 Spanish mackerel. The Eva Mae sank at her dock and disintegrated after Bill and David went to work on the big boats.18 Donnie Mintz was another early party boat operator coming into the fishery in the late thirties after a stint on the dredge Tampa. Donnie first worked as a mate on boats, one of which was the ill fated Nightingale.19 He ran shrimp boats also, operating the Eva Mae for Hugh McGinn in the mid-forties.20 He had the Mayflower built right after the war and then after...
serving her bought and fished the shrimper Charlotte with Clancy Lewis. After this boat was sold he went in with Bob High to purchase the Bennie Lane. He soon sold out to Bob. His next boat was a shrimper, the Betty Ann, after selling her he purchased the Lex from Adrian High in the mid fifties. She was 43 feet long and powered with a Chrysler Crown engine. He carried parties in the summer and shrimped her in the fall. At this time the party business was mostly concentrated between Memorial Day and Labor Day, so it made sense to shrimp in the off season if a boat could be readily converted from one type of business to the other.

Donnie’s next boat was the Bon Jon which he got in the early nineteen sixties. She was 50 feet long and powered with a GM671s. He traded the Bon Jon to his nephew Bobby Mintz for the Summer Song. He renamed her the Bon Jon to take advantage of the name recognition he had built up for the first Bon Jon. She was 55 feet long and powered by two GM871s. This was his last boat and he sold it to his nephew Leroy Mintz. For a couple of years Donnie ran the Rascal for Vivian Bessent on Sundays and I ran the Lex for him. At that time Donnie’s son-in-law “Max” Vereen was running my boat, the Hobby, full time.

One story I recall about Donnie was when we were going down the river to go to sea. I was ahead of Donnie in my boat and he was a couple of hundred yards behind me in the Lex, when he suddenly stopped dead in the water. I started slowing down to see if he was having trouble, but shortly he got back underway. After we crossed the bar I called him on the radio to find out what had happened. He informed me that he had just gotten a new pair of bifocal glasses the day before and when he looked over the side, the water was so close he was sure he was sinking. He had stopped and opened the engine hatch to see how high the water was in the bilge. We kidded Donnie about that many times. Max Vereen, Donnie’s son-in-law, ran my boat for a couple of years before going into the oyster shucking business with his father-in-law.

Frank Juel was synonymous with deep sea fishing at Little River from the late forties into the eighties (Dunnegan 1994). He first became involved in fishing as a mate on the Josephine prior to service in the Navy during World War II. When he returned from the service he operated the Martha Ann, a 45 foot head boat purchased by his wife who operated the hotel at that time. In 1947, the Juels bought a war surplus 63ft air sea rescue boat. They paid $2,500 for it, but had to spend quite a sum in those days to reconfigure it for party fishing. Its original power plants were Hall Scotts that used 100 octane gas.
and gave it a cruising speed of 40 knots. These were replaced with Gray Marine 671s after one year because of the price and difficulty of getting 100 octane fuel. The hulls were very strong because of double planking, the inner ply on a bias with the outer which ran fore and aft. Frank felt he needed even more strength so he also had a keel placed in her. This was the first Hurricane.

The Juel's bought two more 63 ft air sea rescue boats. One became the Hurricane II and was run by Chris Juel, Frank's father. The other was the Sporty and was captained by Billy Brown. Frank also owned the Ocean King for a while. She was 90 ft long, very narrow of beam, and drew about 6/5-7 ft. Once at sea she was surprisingly fast considering she was powered by two Cummins diesels of only 165 hp. She was captained by Leroy Mintz. About 1950 Frank initiated Gulf Stream parties and the Hurricane and the Ocean King were the first to carry them. They would leave the dock at 7 to 8 pm, run for 4 to 5 hours, fish until 10 or 11 am the next day, and return to the dock at about 4 pm. The fare was $15 per head for the first couple of years and then went up to $25.

The next two boats the Juel's had built. They were 65 ft long specifically designed for headboat fishing. One was very broad beamed and had three engines. Frank then got an 85 foot air sea rescue boat that had been used to make the film "P.T. 109." It had two GMV12s. Looking for more speed he bought a 77 foot aluminum hull vessel with two V12s. This vessel cruised at 22 knots, thus allowing the Gulf Stream parties to be a one day trip. Just about all of Frank's boats were named Hurricane and this gave him good name recognition. He hired Claude Dunnegan in the late '50s and early '60s to do promotional work for him and many of the photos contained herein were taken as a part of this effort (Anon 1994).

Frank sold out to Gus Speros in 1976. Since that time he has run boats for the Speros and owns a sport fisherman the Tempest which he charters for trolling inshore and for Gulf stream parties.

A story told about one of the people Frank had hired as a mate concerns the trip back from winter work in Florida. The fellow was not adept at steering by the compass so Frank pointed him out a star to steer toward. Sometime later, after steering in circles for an hour or so, the fellow woke Frank up and asked him to point him out another star as he had passed the first one.

Frank's son Danny has followed in his father's footsteps and is active in the party boat business. He ran the 85 foot air sea rescue boat Hurricane for a while and also worked on boats in the Bahamas. From 1989 to 1994 he ran the Captain Juel II. He is now the captain of the Pride of the Carolinas. This is a 90 ft aluminum hull head boat. She fishes on the black-fish banks and in the Gulf Stream. Frank's father, Chris, also was involved in the sportfisheing. He bought a small shrimp boat, the Mildred Mary and for several years fished for shrimp and then after World War II began to use her for party fishing. In the early '50s he fished the Hurricane II for Frank. After a stint of this he then went back to the Mildred Mary and used her as a trolling boat. She was eventually sold to Tommy Long.

Chris was a colorful character. A World War I veteran, he first came to South Carolina after leaving the service, but then went back to his home state, Nebraska. He stayed for a month or so and returned to Little River. Asked why he came back, he said the prettiest women and the best "likker" was in the South. He was a veterinarian and for a while this provided his livelihood. He got a job carrying the mail and he was known to treat his customers' cows while delivering the mail.

Mr. Luther Wilson at one time was involved in the beach seine fishing at Cherry Grove Beach in the 1930s. He bought a shrimp boat prior to World War II, the Ella Dee. She was 40-42 ft long and was operated by George Brooks. She carried fishing parties on occasion. After the war in 1947 he bought the Helen Jean and the Johnnie Jr. These boats and all subsequent boats Mr. Wilson had were managed by Vance Kinlaw, his son-in-law. Vance and Helen, his wife, opened and operated the Riverside Tavern in 1937 where they sold ice, drinks, fishing supplies, sundries, and basic groceries. Parties on the Helen Jean and Johnnie Jr were booked here. Prior to that Vance had worked on the dredge Tampa. They also rented bateaux to people for river fishing. The Riverside Tavern had rooms for rent at one dollar per night in the late '40s and early '50s. It was also the site for square dances with local musicians and later other dancing with music supplied by the "Juke Box." In the 1950s it was a common occurrence to have an impromptu country music concert at the Tavern with Vance, Jerome Long, Victor Cox, and others entertaining the river front crowds on Sunday afternoons.

Lawrence Long first fished the Helen Jean. She was built as a shrimp boat and was 55 feet long and powered by a GM 671. Olin Carter was the next captain, and then Bill Clemens. She was lengthened to 65 feet after Hurricane Hazel in 1954. The Johnnie Jr was about 46-48 feet long and operated first by Will Blake and then David Clemens. The cost of the Johnnie Jr was about $2,000 in 1947. A second Johnnie Jr was built in 1971 at about a cost of $8-10 thousand dollars. She was operated by Joe Elliott and then Leonard Elliott. The second Helen Jean was built in 1974 at a cost of 18-20 thousand dollars. She was 70x20x5 feet and powered by twin GM 671s. Captain David Clemens ran her. Both boats were sold in 1983. Vance designed the Slow Poke and had her built by Jerome Long. She was 24 ft long and used for river parties and on occasion, a black fish trip.

Vance and Helen opened the Riverside Tavern in 1990. It remained closed until 1997. It appeared that no one was willing to put in the long hours and have the patience to take on operating it until Steve Speros bought it in 1997. The movie "Lolita" was filmed in and around the Tavern in 1965.

Vivian Bessent was an early entrant to the party boat business. He worked on dredges in Florida and South America before buying the Molly from Bob High in 1948. He ran her in the summer for a couple of years before giving up a winter job on the dredge. He bought one of the 63 ft air sea rescue boats in 1949 or 1950 in partnership with Mettler Vereen, and after converting her for party boat work he became a full time member of the recreational fishery at Little River (U.S. Dept. Treasury 1955). She was named the Rascal and he fished her on the nearshore blackfish banks and offshore. He bought the New Rascal, another 63 ft air sea rescue boat, in 1961-62 again in partnership with Mettler Vereen.
He bought out Mettler in 1963 and continued to fish her until he sold out to Joe Elliott in 1975. He and Mettler also built the Blue Heron restaurant on the waterfront and for several years hired people to run it or rented it out. Vivian took his religion seriously and in his later years did not fish on Sunday. Donnie Mintz ran the Rascal on Sunday and Iran Donnie's boat, the Les.

Bill Bessent was another of the early boat men at Little River. He worked on several boats and was at one time the captain of the Nightingale. He fished the shrimper Charlotte for Clarence McCorsley before it was sold to Donnie Mintz and Clancy Lewis. He bought the Eva Mae from Hugh McGinn and fished her until he sold it to the Clemons brothers in 1952. He then purchased the Marsella and kept her until the late fifties when he replaced her with the Betty Rae. These boats were around 42-45 ft long, powered by Chrysler crown engines, and used chiefly for trolling inshore. Bill also had the contract to maintain buoys and lights at Little River for several years.

Sam Gardner of Myrtle Beach brought the Carolina Queen into the party boat fishery in the early 1950s. She was a 84 foot war surplus hull refitted for party fishing. James Ivey Stone ran her along with a Captain Miles and Bill Copeland. She was docked beside the draw bridge across the waterway from Bellamy's Cross Roads, but parties were solicited at Little River. She was relocated at Atlantic Beach, N.C. after an attempt to carry parties from Gardner's Ocean Plaza Pier at Myrtle Beach did not work out. Sam had earlier owned an 85 foot yacht the Patricia that carried parties on occasion.

Mettler Vereen (Samuel Mettler) brought in the largest of the head boats up to this time when he purchased the 104 foot Ocean Queen in the mid fifties. She was docked at Vereen's Marina but also stopped to pick up passengers at a dock at Little River. Her deep draft made it necessary to have a flexible fishing schedule to accommodate the tide on the river bar. On occasion low tide and rough seas forced her to come back through the inlet at Southport, North Carolina and run down the Intracoastal Waterway to Little River. The Ocean Queen was struck and sunk by a freighter in Charleston, SC's harbor on 16 November 1965 as she was being repositioned to Florida for the winter. She sank with the loss of one person (Bowles 1965, Workman 1965).

Early river boat captains other than those that carried deep sea parties were Jerome Long, Lawrence's brother, and J.B. Lockamy. Captain Jerome had worked with Capt. Lawrence Long very early as a river boat man, probably helping him run the Hammer for Bob High. After WWII he owned the Ruben and ran her until he retired. She was a 24 ft outboard powered bateau.

Captain J.B. Lockamy carried parties prior to WWII in open row boats. Rowing them four or five miles down river and back, sometimes getting just $3 for the boat load. After the war he bought the Beatrice from Captain Victor S. Cox and fished her until he retired. Captain Lockamy was a man of simple tastes. Never known to curse and never owned a car or television set. His most violent expression was "Great Dow." One day the Beatrice got caught under the dock and was swamp when the tide rose. When Captain J.B., came down and saw her awash his only observation was, "Great Dow, look at the Beatrice."
Jimmy Stevens spent most of his time fishing out of Marrels Inlet, Calabash, and various parts of Florida. He was however part of the Little River scene on several occasions. He ran the Martha Ann for the Jels and also the Sea Baster and Little Shrimp around 1948. He owned several boats named the Bonita, the Golden Lady, and the ones from Little River docks. He bought an 85 footer, a Bonita, from Montauk, NY in 1980. She was fished from both Calabash and Little River. She was powered by three 671 Detroit diesels giving her a speed of almost 15 miles per hour. It took her about an hour to reach the fishing banks lying 10 miles off the bar, thus making her ideal for half-day fishing trips. She was sold after the fishing season of 1985.

Captain Stevens next boat was the 90 foot New Capt. Jim. She was fished for a while out of Little River by Speros until 1994. He has operated Seas for several years before getting his next boat. He named his after his son James. He was fished over two miles up river from the town docks at Little River. Pat also ran a boat repair facility using a Travel Lift to haul boats. Pat got out of the party business in the mid-seventies and was magistrate at Little River for a while.

Terry Cofee started in the fishing business working with Frank Juel in 1962. He was one of the Hurricanes. He worked on the New Rascal in 1980 with Joe Elliott and then ran the Virginia R. He also ran a 36 foot trolling boat, the Small Boys.

The Sophie, carrying 35 people on one trip, was used as a trolling boat (Myrtle Beach News 1958). He carried people over $30 in days selling a gallon of paint, a 25 cent can for a while. He operated the Chippewa he wanted to load the Chippewa he wanted to unload the Chippewa he wanted to fill it with cargo himself for a while. They ended up in the commercial shrimp fishery. As a young man he worked for Russell's at the town docks at Little River. He ran shrimp boats until he retired.

Robby Searborough now operates the Sundancerr. He carries up to 20 people to the black fish banks or to the Gulf of Mexico. He ran the Virginia R. He sometimes went to Florida and Bimini in the winter. He ran parties now and then on Mr. Russell's boat, the Russwood (Myrtle Beach News 1958).

Nearby he had gotten another load of shrimp. He loaded the Chippewa he wanted to unload the Chippewa he wanted to load the Chippewa he wanted to fill it with cargo and was a 52 foot Huckins Fairfonn Flyer. Captain Vereen retired as operator of a Charleston Harbor pilot boat.

Les High, Bob's brother was one of the first to carry parties offshore, but he died young and was active for only a short while. His son who owned the Les and during the 1950s he ran parties in the summer and shrimped in the winter. He sold his boat to Donnie Mintz and moved to Horizons where he ran shrimp boats until he retired.

Joe Elliott worked with Vivian Bessent on the Rascal in the 50s and ran the Johnnie Jr for Vance Kinlaw and he also captained the Tradewinds and Hurricane for Frank Juel. He began his business half-day runs out of Little River in the Tradewinds. Joe bought the Rascal from Vivian Bessent in 1975 and ran her for several years before retiring. Joe's boys Ed and Randy have followed in their father's footsteps. Both helped on the Rascal. Randy, the eldest, commercial fished on the Blue Seas for several years before getting a charterboat, the Venture. This boat is a modern 32 foot fiberglass boat powered with a 375 hp Detroit diesel.
Mac Nobles was a familiar fixture on the waterfront from the 1950s through the 1970s. He was probably the best mechanic ever to work on the boats. He was equally at home with a diesel or gasoline engine. Mac was too accommodating for his own good, often working through the night to get someone to sea the next day. Hardly any boatman around was not obligated to Mac in one way or another. Mac's son Ronnie worked as a mate on boats and was associated with Jimmy Stevens for several years. He built a beautiful model of the 85 foot Bonita which is on display at the South Carolina Marine Resources Research Institute. Ronnie now has his own construction company.  

James Ivey Stone worked for several of the boat owners for many years. These included Frank Juel, Sam Gardner, Mettler Vereen, and others. He was a talented mechanic and electrician as well as a good seaman. He often did much of the boat handling on the Ocean Queen and Carolina Queen when they were carrying parties. He converted military radios for marine purposes and several boats including mine had examples of his handy work on board.

Kenneth D. Nobles, a West Virginian, came to Little River in the late 1970s. He was involved in the cable television business, but he got interested in the party fishing. He bought the Helen Jean and Johnnie Jr from Vance Kinlaw and then the Bonita from Jimmy Stevens. He bought the Tradewinds IV from Frank Juel and also added the Boss Hog and Virginia R to his fleet. The Boss Hog was later sold to Gus Speros. Mr. Nobles also brought in a commercial boat, the Captain K.D. Nobles entered into a lease/buy agreement for Hugh McGinn's fish house. Nobles is no longer involved on the waterfront at Little River and all of his vessels and fishing facilities have been taken over by others.

**The Fleet Over the Years**

From the beginnings until 1930, probably only four to five head boats owned by Bob High, Les High, Victor Cox, Bob Mintz, and Lisnon Thomas made up the party fishing fleet. Fares ran from $.50 to $1 per person for a full days fishing. During the thirties the number of boats increased to probably a high of eight or nine just before World War II. The general price was $1 per person for an all day trip (6 to 8 hrs). In the late forties war surplus boats came into the fleet and there were probably 10 to 12 boats fishing at one time or another. The fare was $2 per person. In 1956, the gasoline powered vessels were restricted to six passengers by the Merchant Marine Act of 1956. This led to a differentiation between head boats and charter boats (six passengers or less). At this time there were about nine head boats and eight charter boats. A day to the blackfish banks was $5, to the Gulf Stream $15, and a charter $35-$60 for 4-6 people.

The boats shown in the Along the Coast magazine in 1960 fishing out of Little River plus a few others missed when the picture was taken, totalled six head boats, nine charter boats, and four river boats (Darby 1960). The largest of the boats, the Ocean Queen was licensed to carry 175 passengers. The rates had increased to $6 for inshore head boat fishing, $15 for the Gulf Stream, $50-$60 to charter a boat and $15-$20 for a party to fish in the river. Moon light cruises were $2 per person.

Bearden (1969) reported eleven charter boats and four head boats operating from Little River. He listed costs per day on charter boats at $80 to $200 per day for the boat. Individual costs on the head boats were $8 to $12 for a blackfish trip or $20 for a "Gulf Stream" trip. In 1973, seven head boats fished out of Little River (Huntsman 1976b). There were at least ten charter boats and one river boat (Anon 1974, Bearden and McKenzie 1973). Head boat fares ranged from $8-$13 for inshore trips and $20-$25 for Gulf Stream trips.

The fleet in 1977 was made up of seven head boats, eight charter boats, and one river boat. Fares had increased to $10 per half-day trip and $15 per whole day trip for inshore bottom fishing; $30 for a Gulf Stream trip; and had jumped to $200-$250 for an inshore trip and $450 for an offshore trolling trip on charter boats (Moore 1977).

Moore et al (1985) listed five head boats and eight charter boats docked at Little River. Some of the head boats carried up to 100 passengers. A tally by the National Marine Fisheries Service 1996 listed three head boats and ten charter boats (Dixon 1997). Head boats charged $26 half-day, $60 for Gulf Stream fishing, and $65 for shark fishing. Charter boats ranged from $75 for a half-day trolling to a 16 hour marlin trip for $2100. Moonlight cruises were $8 per person with dinner cruises, ocean cruises and a variety of other sea excursions offered. Only one large head boat is fishing out of Little River in 1997. This is the 90 foot Pride of the Carolinas and it concentrates on half-day trips during the week with one Gulf Stream trip on Saturday. Ten or twelve charter boats still sail from the docks at Little River. No river boats were reported.

**The Fishing Grounds**

Prior to World War II all the ocean fishing took place on the blackfish banks. Blackfish, which is the familiar name for black sea bass, has dominated the fish assemblage in these habitats and is responsible for their name (Struhsaker 1969). These were located 5 to 25 miles offshore in depths ranging from 40-120 feet (Struhsaker 1969, Moore et al, 1980, 1985). The fish were congregated on patches of rocky outcrops which provide substrate for attached organisms. These attached animals such as hard coral, soft coral and bryozoans provided food and shelter for mobile organisms as shrimp, crabs, and mollusks which in turn were fed on by black sea bass and other large fish. These areas are commonly called live bottom or blackfish banks (Bearden and McKenzie 1973, Sedberry 1988, Struhsaker 1969).

In the early fifties some of the head boats began to take parties on over-night trips to the snapper-grouper banks. These trips were referred to as "Gulf Stream trips" (Bearden 1969). These areas range up to 50 or more miles offshore in depths exceeding 80 feet (Moore et al, 1980, 1985, Huntsman 1976a). This area, the outer continental shelf, contains two different habitats that attract and concentrate fishes. One, the area lying between depths of 90 to 180 feet, is characterized by low relief patches of coral and rocky outcrops. The other, lying offshore in 180 to 600 feet of water, is the area of the continental slope. Water temperatures on the outer shelf are influenced greatly by the warm Gulf Stream moving north along the shelf break. This results in most of the fish being tropical or subtropical species (Huntsman 1976a, Huntsman and Macintyre, 1971). The snapper-grouper complex, as it is known, is made up of many species of popular food fish such as red and vermilion snapper, red, war-saw, snows, gag and scamp groupers, rock and speckled hind, tile fish, pogies and grunts (Huntsman 1976a,b). Fishing for pelagics by trolls...
A catch of black sea bass on the *Rascal*, mid 1950s. In the early days of the fishery no one ever thought that there could be a limit of the fish in the sea, so a fisherman landed and kept all the fish he could. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

A catch of Spanish mackerel on a trolling boat in the mid 1950s. A catch of over 100 fish by a party of four was not uncommon. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

In the early days of the fishery no one ever thought that there could be a limit of the fish in the sea, so a fisherman landed and kept all the fish he could. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)

boats takes place from almost in the breakers for Spanish mackerel to the outer shelf for marlin, sailfish, and yellowfin tuna. In between the catch may include king mackerel, dolphin, bonita, and bluefish. Most of these fish are abundant late spring through fall. (Moore et al 1980).

Shark fishing takes place inshore where the shrimp boats operate. Sharks are often caught in the area where the shrimp catch is culled.

River fishing catch varies by time of year with best sport, whiting, and croaker catches usually in the fall. Weakfish, red drum, and flounder are present all year but are caught mostly in the summer and fall. Spotted trout are caught just about year around (Bearden and McKenzie 1973; Moore et al 1980).

The Catch Over the Years

The earliest fishermen were out to catch the most and the largest fish possible. They were referred to as "meat fishermen." Sometimes a group would come from upstate North Carolina or South Carolina prepared to take home really large catches of fish, even a pickup truck load. At first some of these fish were probably sold or given to friends, but later with the advent of home freezers, large catches provided table fare throughout the winter. The captains made great efforts to satisfy their customers and to impress their peers. Lawrence Long recalls a catch on the *Josephine* which after the anglers left with all the fish they could handle, he was left with a small truck load, which he gave to a man parked on a hill who then sold them to others.

In the 1950s and '60s, catches of several hundred Spanish mackerel in a day were common. Bill and David Clemons brought in 565 on a day trip on the *Eva Mae*. A party from Concord, NC caught nearly that many on my boat the same day.

Mary Platt, a long time resident of Little River, recalls fishing with the Juel's on several occasions. On one trip in the 1950s she bought back 47 blackfish which probably weighed nearly 100 pounds. Faye Mintz fishing in the 1960s with her father in law, Rob Mintz, caught 177 spot on a river trip. In the fall, many times, a party would catch several 50 pound lard stands full of spot fishing in the river.

The Gulf Stream parties would nearly always load the display rack on the hotel dock. One trip I made with Frank Juel in the early sixties had as its purpose to catch fish for Mary Juel's restaurant. Six of us filled every fish box between six and ninety-three things on a Sunday morning. We were glad to put away the fishing gear and head for home.

As half-day trips became more popular, the emphasis on large blackfish catches necessarily had to change just because of shorter fishing time, but also because of the limited number of fish on inshore banks. Larger boats carrying more passengers also cut down the average catch because it was often impossible to find large concentrations of fish close to shore in the immediate vicinity of the inlet.
As the season progressed, the catch dropped as the banks became fished out. Low (1997) found that statewide average headboat catch per angler per day had dropped from 8.2 pounds to 1.3 pounds in the period 1977 to 1995. The decline of inshore catches may not be as great at Little River as in other areas because of the skill of the captains and relatively more area to fish. Charter boats carrying small parties still commonly bring in around 10 pounds per angler when bottom fishing inshore. A new size limit of 18 inches total length on black sea bass will further reduce the number of fish bought back (Gauden 1997).

The boats fishing offshore in the 1990s still bring in very respectable catches, not as consistently as in 1950s to 1980s, but sometimes over 50 pounds per fisherman. This is particularly true of charter boat parties. The offshore catch in 1977 was dominated by the red porgy, but in 1996 it was chiefly made up of vermilion snapper which may be indicative of excessive fishing pressure on the former species by this fishery (S.C. Dept of Natural Resources 1997).

Many fish are released alive today because of size and catch restrictions placed on the various species by state and federal regulations. However, more and more anglers are practicing tag and release and just enjoy the thrill of the water (Davy 1994). The Governor’s Cup Billfish Tournament awards points for released fish that are included to determine winners in various categories (Anon 1997b). Don Hammond, program leader for the S.C. Department of Natural Resource’s Finfish Utilization Program, estimated that prior to 1989, 90 percent of the billfish caught off South Carolina’s coast were killed. Now the figure has been reversed and more than 90 percent are released alive. Red drum size and bag limits along with tagging has been responsible for a strong recovery of this species (Keefer 1997). This bodes well for the future availability of fish for the sportsman.

### Fishing and Navigational Gear

In the beginning, customers fishing on the black fish banks were furnished with hand lines. These were fashioned from #24 tarred cotton twine. They were about 100 ft long having two 6/0 hooks tied off on two loops just above a sixteen ounce bank sinker. When not in use these were wound on a short piece of wood. The mate tended these lines and often they caught more Spanish mackerel and school bluefish than the party fishing rod and reels.

The first parties were seldom taken out of sight of land. Gause Hill, a very large sand dune which was several miles up the coast in North Carolina, was often used as a point of reference to locate the fishing banks and also to come home by. After 1929, when the Ocean Forest Hotel was built at Myrtle Beach, party boat operators used it as a reference point (Lewis 1988).

Naviagation prior to the late 1940s was done with a watch and compass. The fishing banks were found by steering a course for a given length of time. When in vicinity of the banks, the mate would cast ahead of the boat as it moved slowly along. When he started catching fish two at a time a flag buoy was set. These buoys usually were a 10-12 ft bamboo pole with a cloth flag at the top, a cork float a quarter of the way up on the boom and a weight attached to the end opposite the flag to hold the flag erect. Buoys had a line and an anchor attached to hold them in position. The skipper would allow the boat to drift away from the flag until the fish quit biting and then
would move back up to the bough and make another drift. Sometimes the flag would be left overnight to mark a good spot.

Depth recorders came into the fishery in the late forties followed by fishfinders which showed fish on a cathode ray screen. This made finding fish easier especially at the Gulf Stream. LORAN was the next navigation aid to be employed, first "A" and then "C". Now satellite navigation units are employed by the most sophisticated fishermen. This makes locating the fishing banks very much easier than in the old days.

Ship to shore radios were introduced to the fishery in the late 40s. Some were war surplus military tank radios converted to handle marine channels. First units operated on two or three channels, and then came VHF and now cellular phones are used by fishermen. Single side band radios are used for communicating when far offshore or near major fishing areas.

The earliest engines to be used in the fishery were one and two cylinder gas engines. Some lacked reverse gears and were stopped or backed down by shifting the gears in the wrong order. The earliest engines were used in the fishery for many years as the technology improved.

Some of the early engines were manufactured by Chrysler, Gray, Sterling and Continental. Conversion kits were available that were specifically designed for marine applications. Popular kits made by Osoo and Barr Mfg provided jacketed manifolds for cooling, flame arrestor carburetors, oil coolers and reduction gears. Many people just used the automobile engines as they were with the same gear box. The Josephine was the first party boat to have a diesel. She was powered by a 30 hp Fairbanks-Morse that gave her a top speed of 6-8 mph.

During the '30s the fee was $1 per day. Both river and seagoing boats were most often repaired and maintained by the owners and crew. For many years, bottoms were cleaned and painted by putting the boat aground at high tide. When the tide went out the work was done and the boat re-flotted on the next high tide. Sometimes pine straw was burned under the boat prior to painting to cause enough heat to kill any worms that were present. The bottom planks retained enough moisture to keep from catching fire. Anti-fouling paint at that time was usually applied to a wet boat bottom. When twin screws came in, careening was no longer possible.

Off Season Employment

The first party boat fishermen had to depend more on their off season activities to make a living than the seine recreational fishery. In the beginning party fishing was confined pretty much to the school vacations, Memorial Day to Labor Day. After the party season was over, many of the operators went into the butter business and bought or converted their boats over to shrimping. Some of these were Bob High, Rob Mintz, Victor Cox, Bill Bessent, and Donnie Mintz. Rob Mintz also helped operate a beach seine fishery at Cherry Grove Beach for Mr. Luther Wilson. Late in the fall some fishermen moved from the beach seine fishery to the river to set mid-season seine sets for flounder. Victor Cox ran his boat the Edward through Sheep Head Creek to carry fish caught in Lucian Bryan's beach seine on Wachesaw Island to market. In the mid-1920s, The Fish were salted and packed in 100 pound kegs. Several men clammed and oystered and the Prince, a former purse seiner that had fished for the fertilizer factory carried their catch north to Wilmington, NC. Seafish on many occasions during the 1930s Depressions was bartered for farm products. Following World War II more opposition for off season work became available. Some worked at the nearby beaches in construction. Others extended their fishing season by taking their boats to Florida or getting jobs on boats down there. This group included Frank Juel, Jimmy Stevens, Olin Carter, Leroy Mintz, Danny Juel, and others. Some such as Victor Cox, Victor Juel, and Hugh McGinn and again Leroy Mintz who made a round trip to the fishing area, stayed a week or two. They travelled in T model Fords and other early makes of cars, taking a dirt road from Whiteville, NC to Longs, SC and then to Little River. People from most of North Carolina from the beginning made up a large contingent of the people fishing at Little River and this has remained so to this day.

Most people coming to the coast from mid-and upper South Carolina had a more circuitous route to travel. They went from Conway straight to Myrtle Beach or through Wando, SC to reach Ocean Drive and Cherry Grove Beaches. It was not until a good bridge was built to accommodate the Intracoastal Waterway and link up with Highway 9 in 1934 that the direct route from eastern South Carolina was in place. This route was paved in the late 1930s and this increased the number of visitors from the upper South Carolina and Myrtle Beach area. The Intracoastal Waterway bridge also linked up with the SCDOT Highway 17 and made access from Myrtle Beach and other areas much easier. In recent years strong efforts by North Myrtle Beach and Myrtle Beach chambers of commerce have brought people from all over the world into the area and many have taken advantage of the fishing at Little River.

Some great tales involving some of the individual fishermen are remembered by the captains. One, Victor Cox recalled had to do with a slightly inebriated soldier just after World War II. He, despite all of Captain Victor's efforts, spent most of his day at sea balancing on the rail of the boat or on the edge of the cabin. He never fell off - until just as the boat tied up at the dock he went and had to be fished out of the drink. Another time a man drank a vast amount of whiskey on Frank Juel's boat and became belligerent. He ran to threaten the crew and passengers with a knife and Frank in his efforts to control the man shot him in the shoulder. This allowed the crew to tie him up and he was transported to the Conway hospital when the boat could get ashore. He was very contrite when the alcohol wore off and he sneaked out of the hospital and went directly to the boat and he collapsed and apparently died of kidney failure (Dunnegan 1994). One time Frank had a man aboard the Hurricane who had to put his wife to sea in a direct route from Myrtle Beach to Florida. A friend thought she would get seasick when the headboat began to drift while fishing. He asked to use the ship to ship radio to talk to his wife and when he got through his friend ran onto the deck and started yelling at her by talking about all kinds of quesy types of foods. This didn't sit right with one of the mates so he made a salt squid sandwich with a lot of mayonnaise and put the man on a diet. He would guess she got seasick.

By accident I discovered a fine seasick remedy. On a trip in the early fall we began to catch octopus on hook and line. I saved a few for a science class that a friend taught. We were put in ice on a Styrofoam cooler and placed below in the cabin. One of the party had started feeling bad and had laid down in a berth be
side the cooler. One of the octopii decided that he didn’t like the cooler and crawled out on the ailing man’s arm. This woke the man up and when he saw the creature on his arm made a mad dash up on deck. He stayed there for the rest of the trip and forgot about being sick.

Epilogue

Seventy-five years after a small group of young men found a way to make a living carrying people into the ocean to catch a mess of fish, what has become of this industry as it has matured? The boats have changed. Instead of a conglomeration of boats that had beginnings in some other field, the fleet is made up of high powered, high tech boats specifically manufactured for the purpose for which they are used. One boat now has more power than probably all the engines used between the industry’s beginnings and World War II put together and certainly cost more. It is no longer a mad dash up on deck. He stayed there for the rest of the trip and forgot about being sick.

Vance and Helen Kinlaw provided much valuable information not only about their boats and their Tavern, but also about the early boatmen and their clientele.

Edward High, Captain Bob’s son, was able to provide details of his father’s boats and activities dating back to the first parties. I appreciated this valuable input.

Without the help of Leroy Mintz and Hugh G. Burrell, Jr. my task would have been impossible. Hugh through his recollections gave me an oral history of Little River, spanning his eighty-five years. He went over this paper straightening out where I was wrong and adding to it where needed and I thank him.

Leroy and I spent many hours going over events as he or I recalled them and documenting his and his family’s involvement in the fishery. Faye, his wife, helped greatly in dating many happenings. Leroy’s time went back to his time experiences prior to World War II.

Paul Vernon provided photographs from the Dunngan collection which date back to the mid-fifties and I thank him for his interest in this project.

Gilbert Maggioni researched the specifics of many vessels through his early published registries of commercial vessels and I do appreciate his involvement.

Asia Lynch patiently helped me get the paper in a readable form. Charles Barans, David Cupka and Glenn Ulrich reviewed the manuscript and provided valuable critiques and I thank them.

Lastly, I have to thank those early fishermen who were my mentors and friends. Their stories of the beginnings of recreational fishing in the Little River area were instrumental in inspiring me to undertake this effort. So to the late Victor S. Cox, Bob High, and Rob Mintz I say thanks and ask for their forgiveness if I didn’t get it just right.

Acknowledgements


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I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Catherine Lewis, retired Horry County Librarian, and C.B. Berry a noted historian of the area. Both of them not only provided their published articles on the area, but also shared their valuable insights into many of the early events concerning Little River. The late Ralph Ellis and I spent several mornings going through his files documenting events in the fishery and recording his recollections. Frank Juel took several hours of his time to provide times, fishing methods, boat names and even when he called his long and varied career. David Clemens in several sessions gave an insight into early boats and fishermen as well as occupations of the boatmen. Lawrence Long at ninety-two went back into the earliest days of the fishery and told me of his involvement. Larry, his eldest son and I spent several productive sessions at his supper table as he brought me up to date on new fishing activities.

Little River itself has changed from a small village with two or three stores, to a bustling community with about all the amenities one could want. Retirees from other areas now make up a significant part of the population. The river front itself however has retained much of its character. The main street has been paved and the docks are wider and better maintained, but other than that it looks about as it did in the ‘30s.

Eating and lodging facilities have kept up with demand both in available rooms and cuisines offered. People are too sophisticated now for the rest of the trip and forgotten about being sick.

The river front is no longer a mad dash up on deck. He stayed there for the rest of the trip and forgot about being sick. The River Hotel and Riverview Tavern of the ‘30s and ‘40s that were cooled with whatever breeze that came through the open windows. Nothing has taken the place of the meals offered at Mrs. Kate Vereens or Mrs. Mary Platts however.

What is the future of the fishery? The pioneers, who dominated the scene up until World War II, are gone and their successors, the second wave of boatmen have turned up until the eighteen hours of his time to provide times, fishing methods, boat names and even when he called his long and varied career. David Clemens in several sessions gave an insight into early boats and fishermen as well as occupations of the boatmen. Lawrence Long at ninety-two went back into the earliest days of the fishery and told me of his involvement. Larry, his eldest son and I spent several productive sessions at his supper table as he brought me up to date on new fishing activities.

A fisherman does not expect to feed his family all winter on the catch and all are concerned with doing what they can to persevere and increase the release is the norm for many species and all are concerned with doing what they can to persevere and increase the release is the norm for many species.
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About the Author
Victor G. Burrell, Jr. is the director emeritus of the Marine Resources Research Institute of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Dr. Burrell grew up in Florence, S.C. His first contacts with the Little River community began in 1935 when he was carried river fishing in a rented skiff by his uncle, Ted Burrell. Two or three of these trips a year became the norm up until about 1940. In 1937, Burrell was a camper at the YMCA camp at Cherry Grove Beach, S.C. It was the practice to carry the campers on an overnight camp out at what is now Ocean Isle Beach, N.C. The campers were transported there by a vessel chartered at Little River.

In 1937 the boat hired was the Edward piloted by Victor S. Cox. After a stint in the U.S. Navy during World War II, Burrell completed a B.S. degree at the College of Charleston and went to work on a family business in Florence. He purchased a 41-foot boat built by Captain Eddie Gardner, a Charleston Harbor pilot, in 1950, and started carrying parties on weekends from Vereen’s Marina on the Intracoastal Waterway. In 1952, Captain Victor S. Cox began running the Hobby during the week while Burrell operated her on weekends. This continued until 1958. Then Victor E. Cox took over for his father.

In the early 1960s Donnie Mintz began to carry the Rascal out for Vivian Bessent on Sunday and Burrell ran his boat the Les. On occasion Burrell ran private boats for people and filled in on other boats at Little River. In 1965 Burrell returned to school at the College of William and Mary. He received a PhD in Marine Science in 1972. The Hobby was sold to finance some of the schooling and often when asked about her Burrell says we ate her. After graduation Burrell returned to South Carolina as a marine scientist at the Marine Resources Research Institute (MRRI) of the S.C. Wildlife and Marine Resources Department, where he became MRRI director in 1974 and retired in 1991.