

Name: Patrick Boyle
Title: Masters Candidate
Email: boylepa19@students.ecu.edu

Title of Proposal: Dredging Up History: An Oyster Vessel Wrecked in Washington, North Carolina

Abstract: Oysters were a significant food source for Native Americans and settlers of North Carolina. Many of the early coastal cities of North Carolina, such as Washington, created local oyster markets. The absence of a fast and reliable means of transporting the harvest to inland cities, however, precluded the establishment of a larger oyster industry. Yet, in the late 1880s, the North Carolina oyster industry was subject to a rise in activity. The depleting oyster beds and stricter fishing laws in the Chesapeake Bay region caused oyster fishers to search for new areas to obtain oysters. The estuaries of North Carolina were soon flooded by oyster fishers and their unique ship types from the Chesapeake Bay region. Many of these vessels were specifically designed for the oyster fishery which included brogans, bugeyes, and skipjacks. Recent investigations of a shipwreck located near the historic port of Washington suggests an association with the North Carolina oyster fishery. Though the exact ship type has yet to be determined, evidence suggests it is a Chesapeake Bay bugeye. This paper discusses East Carolina University's Program in Maritime Studies documentation of the site, as well as efforts to identify the possible vessel type and whether it was constructed specifically for the oyster industry.