# The Recreational Fishery in South Carolina: The Little River Story

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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.[1] 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).[1]

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.[2]

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.[5] 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.[2,3,4] 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.[4]



*The Little River water front in 1948, looking south. The docks are to the left. Note the unpaved road. (from an old postcard courtesy of V. Kinlaw)*

## 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.[1]

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-

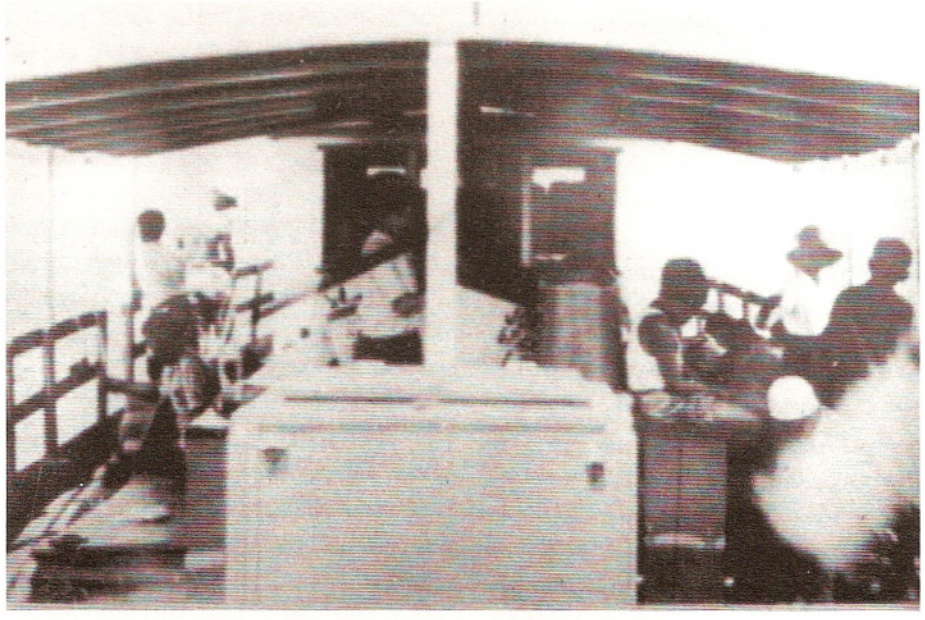
spective buyers (Lewis 1988a). And as mentioned earlier by 1923 enough people were visiting Little River that a few local boatmen began to offer fishing trips to the nearshore Blackfish banks.

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.[3]

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 for the waterway when they began their work in the area. He later worked for the Corps as a survey party member.[1] 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.[3] This greatly increased the fame of Little River as customers extolled the virtues of her after returning home. In the late '30s the **Joesephine** 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.

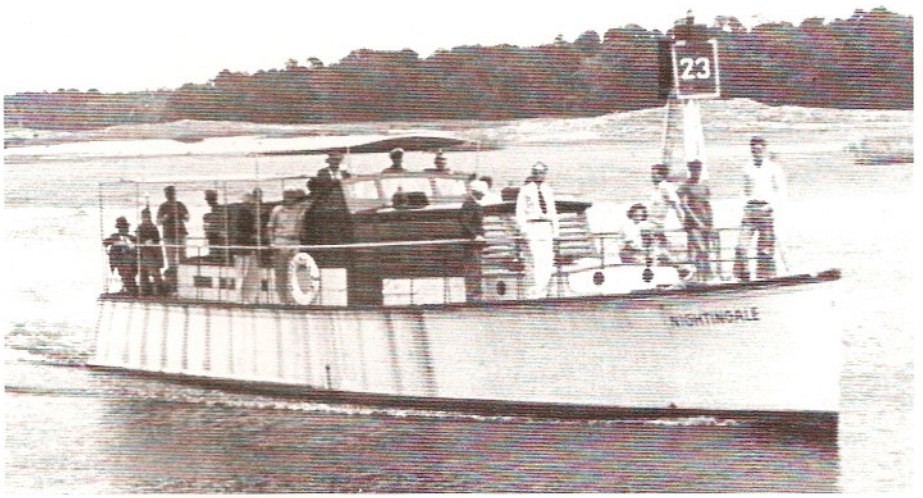
On 18 May 1941, the **Nightingale**, a 48 foot twin engine yacht converted to a headboat blew up killing seven



*The **Josephine** looking forward. This photo was taken in the mid 1930s. (copy of owned by Lawrence Long)*



*Boys from the YMCA Camp Nixon with blackfish caught on the **Josephine**. Mid 1930s. (copy of photo owned by Lawrence Long)*

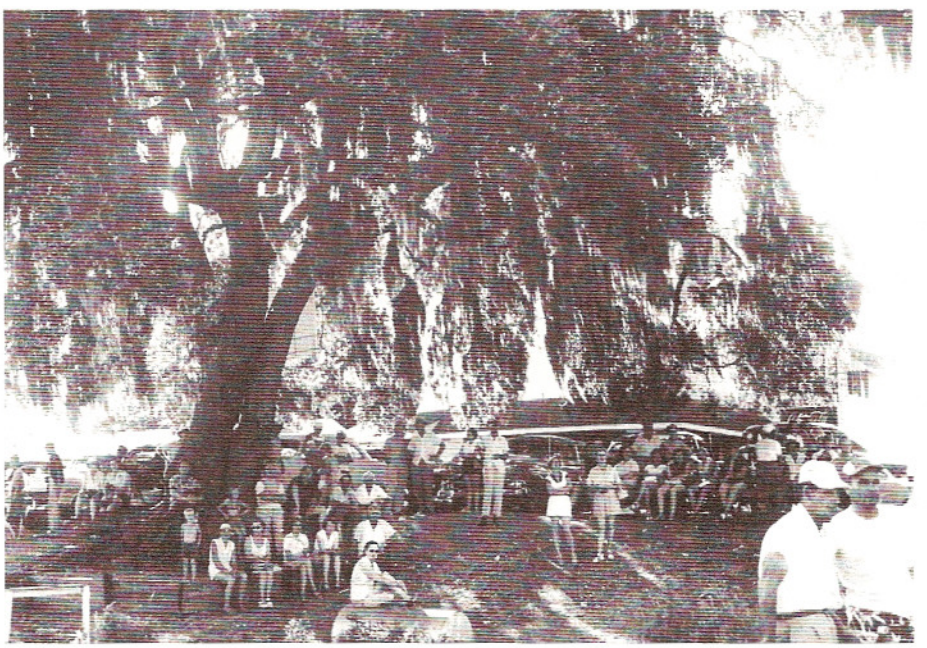



*The **Nightingale** in the late 1930s Captain Rob Mintz at the wheel. This was prior to refurbishment in 1940 which included replacement of engines. (photo courtesy Mrs. T.V. Bessent)*

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.[4] The **Edward** captained by Victor S. Cox and the **Cadet** captained by Rob Mintz rescued most of the passengers and all of the crew. (Charleston News and Courier 1941, Charleston Evening Post 1941). 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.[4] 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.[4]

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.[4] Lawrence Long sold the **Josephine** shortly after the war.[2] As life returned to normal and people had more time for vacations the fishing picked 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**.[7,8] About 1947 Frank Juel bought the first of several 63 foot war surplus air sea rescue boats. Vivian Besssent in part-



*People waiting under the oaks for the fishing boats to return from fishing trips. Some came from the nearby beaches to see the boats and catches, some came to pick up family who went out on the boats and others were waiting around to arrange a trip themselves. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*



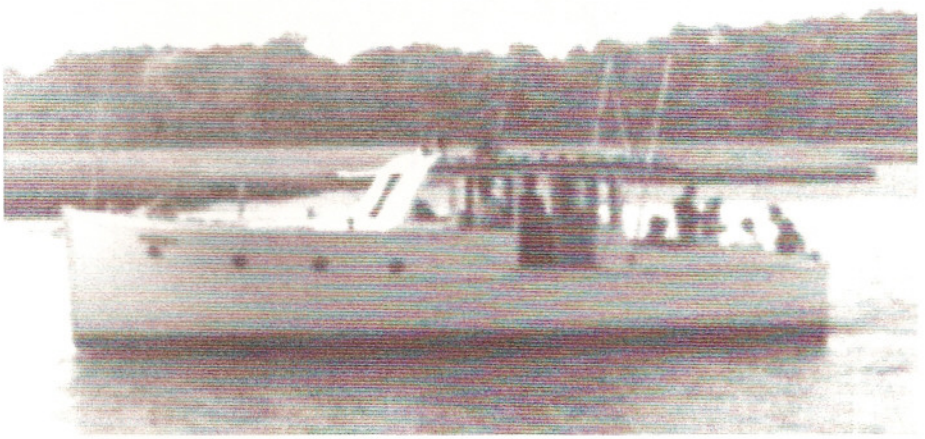
*The first **Helen Jean** prior to 1954. At this time she was 55 feet long. After Hurricane Hazel she was lengthened to 65 feet. (postcard courtesy of V. Kinlaw)*



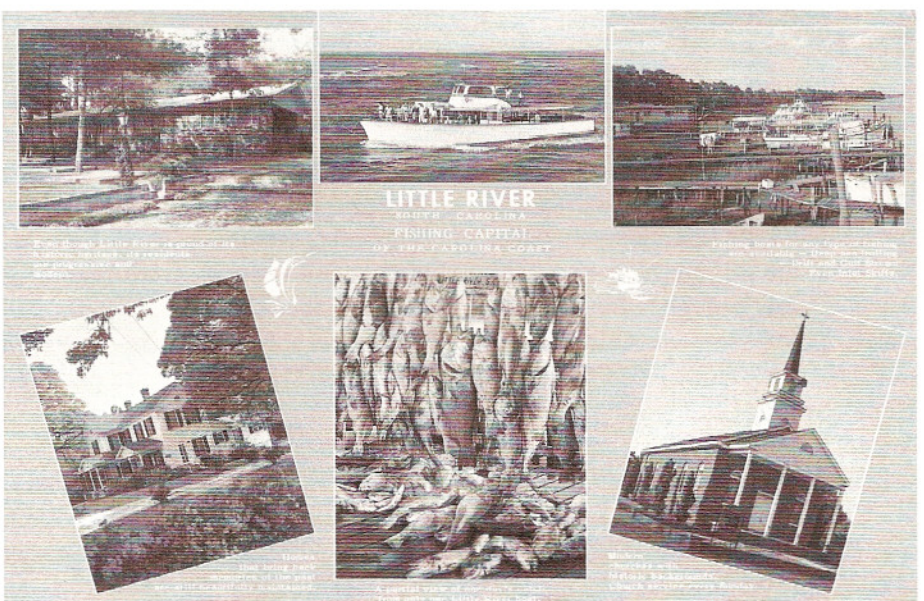

*Vivan Bessents' first **Rascal**. She was a World War II air sea rescue boat converted for bottom fishing. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*




*Sam Gardner's Carolina **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 V.G. 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)*

nership with Mettler Vereen also acquired another. These boats were good seaboats, moderately fast, powered with 671 GM diesels, had shallow drafts, and a lot of deck space for fishermen.[8] Sam Gardner of Myrtle Beach brought in a 84 foot air rescue boat named the **Carolina Queen**. She carried blackfish fishing parties and also was used for moonlight cruises. Mettler Vereen bought the **Ocean Queen**, a 104 ft. war surplus craft, in 1952. Both of these boats had to schedule departures to take into account tidal height on the inlet bar as they drew two or three feet more than other boats at the time. Surplus military radios and other gear helped modernize the fleet.

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.[9]

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 work boats.[1,4,7]

In the early-to-mid fifties Frank Juel initiated "Gulf-stream" fishing on the snapper-grouper banks. Several boats became involved.[8] Some would fish the blackfish banks on a day trip and then after cleaning up and a short nap by the crew, head back




*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)*

off shore for a 20 to 24 hour excursion.[8,10] 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.[8]

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.[4,8] This actually 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 jetties 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.[4,7,8] 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



*The author and party with a catch of several hundred Spanish mackerel in 1954. (photo from the author)*



*Victor E. Cox and a catch of Spanish and king mackerel caught trolling inshore off Little River Bar, 1959. (photo courtesy of Mrs. V.E. Cox)*

and ran the boat for the owners.[4,6] 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.[11,12,13]

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



*Head boats waiting for the tide to rise enough for them to cross Little River Bar, 1950s. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*



*The Little River jetties completed in 1983 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This allowed deep draft vessels to transit the bar on any tide. (photo from the author)*

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 hardly anyway that the federal government would come up with the estimated one million dollars to fund the project. Ralph persisted and finally during his time as a state senator, he and others convinced those in Washington that the jetties should be constructed. They were completed in 1983, some forty years after Ralph's dealings with Senator Johnson, at a cost of 25 million dollars. A big problem in getting the jetty project started stemmed from the fact that the North Carolina—South Carolina border had always been considered Little River inlet. After this was resolved the project became a reality.[9] This allowed deeper draft boats to use the inlet pretty much at any tidal stage and also kept the channel in one place (C.B. Berry, 1996b, Megivern 1996).

Artificial reefs that added to the fish habitat were constructed in the waters off Little River Inlet. The first of these was begun in 1975 as a joint venture between the SC Wildlife & Marine Resources Department (now the Department of Natural Resources) and the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. Little River Reef was started with used automobile and truck tires, with other types of material added later. It is very close inshore in 20 -30 ft. of water. Two other reefs have been located in the area, one about 11 miles from the mouth of the inlet and the other further off at about 33 miles out and to the south (Bell 1996, Myatt 1978). Theses small reef areas are not used to a great extent by headboats and charter boats, but they have served to attract people to the Little River area and provided enhanced fishing for smaller boats fishing out of Little River inlet (Liao and Cupka 1979 Cupka 1974).

The United States Congress passed the Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 1976 to address the problem of declining fishery resources. This law established an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) which gave the federal government control of all organic resources lying in waters beyond the state three mile limit to 200 miles offshore. This has resulted in development of a series of management plans which among other things place catch limits on the

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recreational fisheries (Jacobson 1978). Catches of mackerel, billfish, and the snapper-grouper complex which includes black sea bass have various restrictions such as minimum size limits, allowable catch per person per day and annual total allowable catch by recreational fisheries. These regulations are continually being updated and in 1987 charter boats were required by an amendment to the coastal migratory pelagic resources plan to have permits to fish in the EEZ. A red drum managment plan prohibits possession of this species in or from the EEZ (Smith Atl. Fish Mgt. Council, 1997). Concern for the resources that brought about this act, were felt by many sport fishermen. They, realizing the pressure on gamefish species, have made tag and release a rule on many of their fishing trips (Davy, 1994). Some tournaments are using photographic evidence to record released catches (Anon, 1994).

The state of South Carolina, with the passage of the marine Recreational Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 1991, required all boats carrying fishing parties for hire to purchase charter vessel permits. This legislation also required persons fishing in saltwater from private boats to purchase an annual marine recreational fishing stamp (S.C. Dept. Natural Resources 1996). Salt waters in the Little River area are defined as the waterways seaward of the intracoastal waterway bridge at Nixons Crossroads. The state has also passed laws which place size and catch limits on fish caught or landed within salt waters under state jurisdiction and which provide that certain federal laws pertaining to fish caught in federal waters adjacent to the S.C. coast are also the law within areas under state jurisdiction.

## 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 **Doubleender**. She was powered by a Minimus 8 horsepower make or break engine.[5] 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.[4]

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 Palmer engine. Bob and Junior McCorsley bought the **Acey Horton** around this time and used her as a party boat. Bob replaced the **Acey Horton** with the **David K**. This boat had a shrimper 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 6 cylinder Chrysler Crown.[5] Just before the war he ran the **Eva Mae** for Hugh McGinn and after WWII he bought the **Molly** a twin screw boat. He kept her a short time and sold her to Vivian Bessent.[1,5]

His last boat was the **Bennie Lane**. At first he and Donnie Mintz owned her together and they shrimped in the fall and carried parties in the summer. Bob bought out Donnie and eventually she was used entirely as a party boat. She was 45 ft. long and powered with a Chrysler Crown. Bob retired in 1966.[5]




*Bob High with a party in the late 1950s. Photos of Bob are rare. His son, Edward, lost all of his in a hurricane related flood in the early 1990s. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*



*Victor Sloane Cox talking to prospective customers on the "Hill" at Little River in the mid 1950s. (photo from the author)*

Bob High was a very crusty character and seldom backed off from any situation. One time one of his parties, which had been drinking rather heavily, refused to pay him for the trip. Capt. Bob merely tied up to the inland waterway marker across from the dock and called to someone on the shore to get the sheriff - while he kept the party at bay with a sock loaded with fish sinkers. The party paid up and he brought them to shore.[3,4]

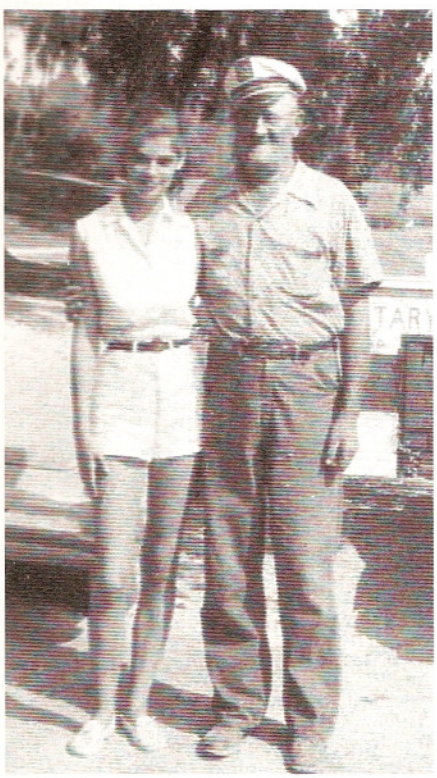
During Hurricane Hazel, Bob took the **Bennie Lane** out into the river right into the teeth of the storm. He saved his boat, but he said he promised the Lord that he would never do that again. Asked if he was scared, he said "I wore one life preserver and was standing on another."

Victor Sloan Cox was another who had a succession of boats. Some he owned and some he managed or fished for others. Victor had an early acquaintance with boats at Little River. One of his early jobs was operating a steam launch to bring sailing vessels across the bar and dock them at the oyster factory. This was before he entered service in WWI.[3] 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, walked by Capt. Victor painting the **Edward** one day 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".[5] 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 her until he went back into the service in WWII.[5]

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 Arnold of Southport, N.C.(U.S. Treasury Dept 1945, 1955)[4] 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 my boat. He ran her until his son Victor Earl Cox took over in the late 50's. The Hobby was 41 X 12 X 2.5 feet. She was powered with a Chrysler Crown and then a Chrysler Ace.

In his later years Capt. Victor S. Cox ran river boats from time to time also. They were approximately 24 to 26 feet long, and powered by outboards. Some of these boats were the **Beatrice**, the **Evelyn** and the **Dixie Queen.** Capt. Cox sold the **Beatrice** to J.B. Lockamy. Capt. Victor S. Cox and Capt. Rob Mintz at one time solicited customers for headboats. Some great stories were told about the promises made to prospective clients. Victor Earl Cox said of his father: "One day the **Hobby** will come around the bend in the river with the moon flying from the outriggers -Then you'll know I finally caught what daddy promised." Another story told on them had it that a group sent on the **Rascal** would not put their lines in the water when the fishing banks were reached. When asked why they weren't fishing - they said the man that sold them their tickets had promised that the fish would jump in the boat.[10]

Captain Rob Mintz was another of the very first headboat operators. He ran boats for various people until 1937 when he bought his first sea going party boat **The Cadet**. She was about 46-48 ft. long, powered by a Buick automobile engine. Captain Rob paid about $200 for her. She al-



*Captain Rob Mintz and daughter-in-law, Mrs. Leroy Mintz, in 1954. (photo courtesy of Mrs. Leroy Mintz)*



*Captain Rob Mintz and sons Bobby (left), Leroy (right), 1954. Both followed Rob's footsteps and became party boat operators. (photo courtesy of Mrs. Leroy Mintz)*

ready had a career as a tug boat and a shrimper. Her speed was a breathtaking 5 or 6 miles per hour, which was pretty much par for the course at this time. The **Cadet** was put on the hill during World War II and had to be rebuilt after the war. She was renamed the **Sea Rambler** and used as a shrimp boat. She was sold in 1947. Rob lost an eye in 1947 and did the rest of his party work in the river.[4]

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 Palmer "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 "mothball" merchant fleet anchored at Wilmington, NC some 55 miles distant.[4]

Some ladies were admiring the very large live 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 is, I was just a boy when it was planted."

Captain Rob's father was a pioneer fisherman in the area, fishing haul seines on the beach and in the river and Captain Rob himself ran a haul seine fishery at Cherry Grove and Waties Island. Captain Rob's sons also followed in his 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 Waddell's father. In the '50s, he owned the party boats **Victory** and **Bob Dan**.[4] 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.[4,14] Lacy's other son Bobby, is in the party business running the **Sea Screamer** which is a 73 foot speed boat carrying people on sight seeing excursions in the waterway and off-shore along the Grand Strand beaches. He started out sneaking aboard his father's boat when he was 10 or 11 years old. He workd as a mate on the Helen Jean and ran boats for the Speros for eight years.[4,14]

Rob's youngest, Bobby Mintz, had several boats one of which was the **Folly III** renamed the **Bob Dan** when he sold it to brother Lacy. He ran parties at Murrells Inlet for a while and one of his boats was the **Bon Jon**. This last boat was sold to his uncle Donnie Mintz. "Winkie" Mintz, the third son, never did get into the recreational fishery other than help out on party boats. He went into the Coast Guard, taught in the Technical College system, and became a Baptist minister. His only commercial boat was a shrimper.[4,15]

Leroy, the second son, was most involved in the fishery. He mated on party boats from the time he was ten years old. He was a striker on the ill fated **Nightingale** when she blew up in 1941 and by some accounts is credited with saving a number of the passengers (Charleston Evening Post 1941,Charleston News and Courier 1941). He makes little of being a hero. He, as a teenager, ran a private boat **Chickasaw**, for John Barrier the president of Pilot Life Insurance Co. He shrimped the **Sea Rambler** for his family right after World War II and then ran a charter boat, the **Mark Twain**, for A.D. Hinson. For a few years he worked on boats in Florida, then came back to carry parties in 1961. He then operated the **Carolina King** for Frank Juel, taking parties to the blackfish banks and also to the Gulf Stream. He bought the **Touchdown** a 43 foot air sea rescue boat in 1962 and carried parties on her until 1969. He shrimped on his own boat the 75 foot **Tim Allen** in Florida until 1977. He then got back into the party business in 1980 when he bought the **Windjammer** from his brother, Bobby. She was 50 feet long and powered by an 871 GM. He renamed her 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 surveying company and looks back fondly on his coming up in the party boat fishery.[4]

Lawrence Long was the very last of the early party boat skippers. He began in the mid '20s by taking river



*Leroy Mintz's* ***Bon Jon*** *which he bought from his uncle Donnie Mintz in the 1980s. (photo courtesy of Leroy Mintz)*




*Larry Long's* ***Black Fish****. He charters her during the summer to recreational fishermen and pots for black sea bass in the off season. (photo from the author)*

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.[6] 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.[3] The **Josephine** was sold in 1946 to be used as a freight boat.[2] Captain Long next ran the **Helen Jean** for Vance Kinlaw[7] and then the **Joy,** a trolling boat, for Frank Juel.[8] In the late '50s he built a trolling boat, the **Cheryl Ann**. 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.**[12,13,16,17]

Bill and David Clemons need to be addressed together as they worked very closely with one another. Bill the older brother first mated 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.[4] David started out mating 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**.[18] After Bill's death, David took over the **Helen Jean** and ran her even after the Kinlaws sold her in the early '80s. He retired from boat operating in 1985 and now operates a successful tackle shop that caters to the fishing fleet.[18]



*Larry Long's granddaughter, Christina, and friend with a shark caught on his boat the **Black Fish**. (photo courtesy of Larry Long)*

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.[1,18] 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**.[4] He ran shrimp boats also, operating the **Eva Mae** for Hugh McGinn in the mid-forties.[1] He had the **Mayflower** built right after the war and then after




*Captain Donnie Mintz, left, and Captain Vivian Bessent, right, and an unidentified crewmember with a grouper caught on the* ***Rascal****, 1953. (photo courtesy of Mrs. Max Vereen)*

selling her bought and fished the shrimper **Charlotte** with Clancy Lewis.[1,4] After this boat was sold he went in with Bob High to purchase the **Bennie Lane**. He soon sold out to Bob.[5] His next boat was a shrimper, the **Betty Ann**, after selling her he purchased the **Les** from Adrian High in the mid fifties.[4,5] 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 GM671. 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.[4] For a couple of years Donnie ran the **Rascal** for Vivian Bessent on Sundays and I ran the **Les** 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 **Les,** 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.

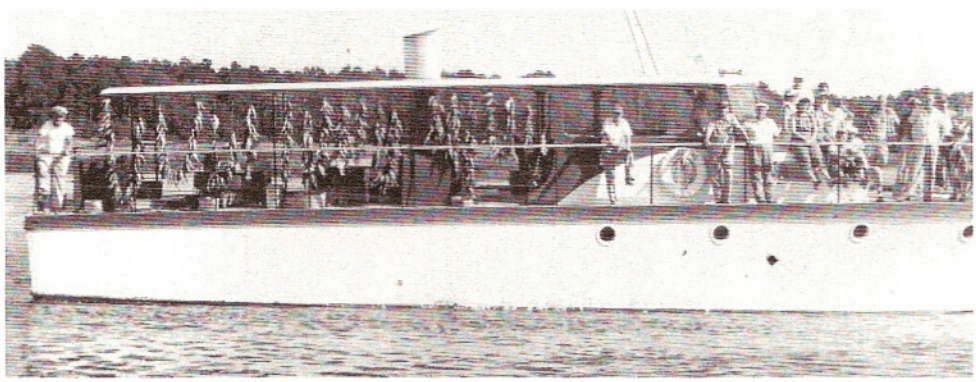
Frank Juel was synonymous with deep sea fishing at Little River from the late forties into the eighties (Dunnegan 1994). He first became involved in fishing as a mate on the **Josephine** prior to service in the Navy during World War II.[8] When he returned from the service he operated the **Martha Ann**, a 45 foot head boat purchased by his wife who operated the hotel at that time. In 1947, the Juels bought a war surplus 63 ft 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




*Frank Juel's first* ***Hurricane*** *with the Myrtle Beach Beauty Queen contestants in the mid 1950s. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*




*Captain Danny Juel captains the* ***Pride of the Carolinas*** *a 90 foot modern head boat that carries parties to the Black Fish Banks and the Gulf Stream. This is the only head boat operating from Little River docks in 1999. (photo from and advertising brochure)*



*Chris Juel standing on the stern of the* ***Hurricane II*** *with the catch of black sea bass displayed for potential customers watching from the "Hill", mid 1950s. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*

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 Juels 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.[8] Frank also owned the **Ocean King** for a while. She was 90 ft long, very narrow of beam, and drew about 6½-7 feet. Once at sea she was surprisingly fast considering she was powered by two Cummings diesels of only 165 hp. She was captained by Leroy Mintz.[4,8] 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 8pm, 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.[8]

The next two boats the Juels 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.[8] He hired Claude Dunnegan in the late '50s and early '60s to do promotional work for him and many of the photographs contained herein were taken as a part of this effort (Anon 1994).

Frank sold out to Gus Speros in 1976.[19] 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 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 blackfish banks and in the Gulf Stream.[11]

Frank's father, Chris, also was involved in the sportfishery. He bought a small shrimp boat, the **Mildred Mary** and for several years fished for shrimp and then after World War II he 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.[8,16]

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



*Captain Chris Juel discussing a shark with a friend, late 1950s. (photo courtesy of Frank Juel)*



*The Riverside Tavern in the early 1950s. Ice, bait, fishing tackle, groceries and sundries were sold to fishermen going out on the boats. (postcard courtesy of Vance Kinlaw)*



*Vance and Helen Kinlaw, 1954, operated the Riverside Tavern from 1937 to 1990. They booked parties on the **Helen Jean** and **Johnnie Jr.** as well as rented wooden rowboats. (photo courtesy of Mrs. Leroy Mintz)*

treat his customers' cows while delivering the mail.[8]

Mr. Luther Wilson at one time was involved in the beach seine fishery 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 bateaus 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 crowd 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 Clemons. 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 Clemons. 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 Clemons 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.[7]

Vance and Helen closed 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 1995.[7]

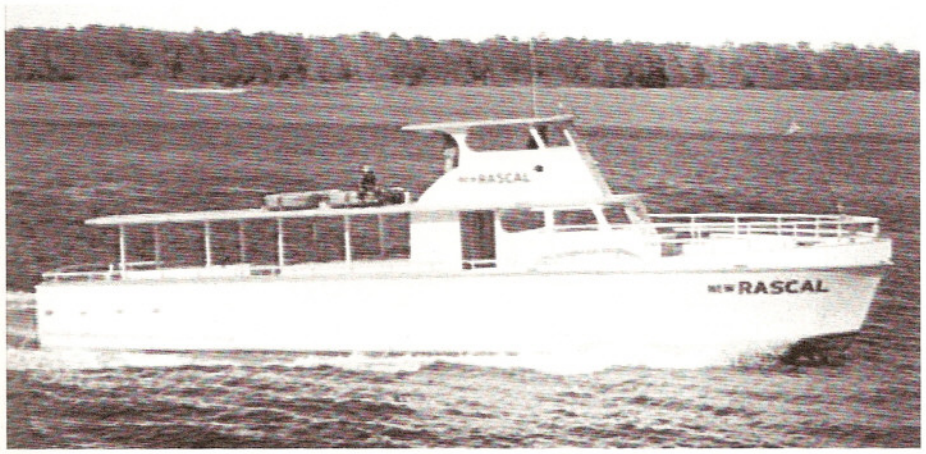
Vivian Bessent was an early entrant to the party boat business. He worked on dredges in Florida and South America before buying the **Molly** from Bob High in 1948.[5,10,20,21] He ran her in the summer for a couple of years before giving up a winter job on the dredge. He bought one of the 63 ft air sea 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 later offshore. He bought the **New Rascal,** another 63 ft air sea rescue boat, in 1961-62 again in partnership with Mettler Vereen.




*The new **Johnnie Jr.** in the mid 1970s. She was owned and booked by the Kinlaws. (postcard courtesy of Vance Kinlaw)*




*Captain Vivian Bessent and a party that he took out on his boat the **Rascal**, mid 1950s. Vivian is second from the right. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*




*The **New Rascal** in the late 1960s. Owned by Vivian Bessent then sold to Joe Elliot in 1975. (postcard courtesy of Mrs. T.V. Bessent)*

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.[10,20] Vivian took his religion seriously and in his later years did not fish on Sunday. Donnie Mintz ran the **Rascal** on Sunday and I ran 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**.[4] 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.[18] 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 bouys 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 another war surplus craft. 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 accomodate 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.[2,5] After WWII he owned the **Rueben** and ran her until he retired. She was a 24 ft outboard powered bateau.[12]

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.[1,4] His most violent expression was "Great Dow". One day the **Beatrice** got caught under the dock and was swamped when the tide rose. When Captain J.B., came down and saw her awash his only observation was, "Great Dow, look at the **Beatrice**."



*Captains J.B. Lockamy, left, and Rob Mintz, 1954. Two of the early river boat party men. (photo courtesy of Mrs. Leroy Mintz)*

Jimmy Stevens spent most of his time fishing out of Murrells 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 Juels and also the **Sea Buster** and **Little Shrimp** around 1948. He owned several boats named the **Bonita** and on occasion he fished them from Little River docks.[22] 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.[23] Captain Stevens next boat was the 90 foot **New Captain Jim**. She was fished for a while out of Little River and was sold to the Speros in 1990 along with Captain Jim's Marina at Calabash, NC. This boat was then renamed the **Hurricane II**.[22]

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.[7,8] He began half-day trips on the **Tradewinds**. Joe bought the **Rascal** from Vivian Bessent in 1975 and ran her for several years before retiring.[20]

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 ft fiberglass vessel powered with a 378 hp Detroit diesel.[24]

Ed operated the **Johnnie Jr.** for L.D. "Tink" Benton in the mid-eighties and then the **Cyclone** for the Speros until 1994. He has operated his own boat since then. It is a 32 ft fiberglass trolling boat powered by a 325 hp Catapillar engine. She is named the **Lucky Strike** and fishes from a marina located at the foot of the old highway 9 Intracoastal Waterway bridge.[24]

Pat Bellamy got into the recreational fishery in the early fifties. He first owned the **Elselma,** a yacht that was used as a trolling boat (Myrtle Beach News 1954b).[4] He named his subsequent boats the **Ron Tom** after his sons. He had a trolling boat and then a head boat. They were docked at the Ron Tom Marina which was about 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 Coffee started in the fishing business working with Frank Juel on one of the **Hurricanes**. He worked on the **New Rascal** in 1980 with Joe Elliott and then ran the **Virginia R** and the **Party Time** in the mid- eighties. Most recently he has served as captain of the **Pride of the Carolinas**. This was a stint of about ten years. In 1997 he took over the **Fish Screamer**.[25]

Billy John Vereen (W.J.) was involved in the recreational fishery as the operator of yachts used by corporations to entertain executives and customers. Billy John began his fishing as a mate on the **Josephine** for Lawrence Long. He made a trip on the Josephine in 1938 to pick up YMCA campers at Mars Bluff, SC on the Pee Dee River and bring them to Camp Nixon.[6]

Billy John operated L.M. Boyd's yacht the **Lois Ann** for a couple of years and then the **Flying Fish** for Paul Russell. These were North Carolina industrialists. He took the **Flying Fish** to Florida and Bimini in the winter. He ran parties now and then on Mr. Russell's boat, the **Russwood** (Myrtle Beach News 1954b). She was a 52 foot Huckins Fairform Flyer. Captain Vereen retired as operator of a Charleston Harbor pilot boat.[6]

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 Adrian 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 Florida, where he ran shrimp boats until he retired.[1,4]

Robby Scarborough now operates the **Sundancer**. He carries up to 20 people to the black fish banks or to the Gulf Stream. In the past he ran the **Virginia R**, **Boss Hogg**, and **Sea Gypsy**.[26]

Robert Small carried parties on the **Cheryl Ann**, the **Swift Ship I**, the **Shannon Maria**, and in 1997 started on a 36 foot trolling boat,the **Small Boys**.[27]

The **Sophie,** carrying 35 people and run by Captains Leonard and Marlowe, was advertised as fishing from Little River in 1938 (Myrtle Beach News 1938).

Others who operated vessels from time to time included Lenzy Carter who ran the **Marbill** both at Little River and in Florida; Gerald Nixon who operated my boat, **The Hobby** for a short while; Bobby Gore who ran the **Joy**; Bill Brown on the **Sporty** and **Hurricane II**; and William Scott, the **Viola III** between 1950 and the mid-70s. In the period between the mid-70s and late-80s, the following were active: Neil Juel operated the **Golden Lady**; Jim Williamson; the **Big Mike** and **The Other Woman**; Ed Lenke captained the **Sea Gypsy**; Roger Owens the **Amberjack**; B.E. Lewis on the **Tom Cat**; Larry Platt on the **Dolphin** and the **Carolina Princess**; Chip Stevens on the **Cy-**

**clone**; and Norman Bligh on the **Carol Annes Bounty** (Moore 1977, Moore et al 1980, Moore et al 1985).

Nearly all boys growing up around the waterfront worked as mates on the boats. Many of them ended up operating boats but some went on to other things. Some of those who did not end up as captains were Willie Todd, Herschel Williamson, Buddy Dennis, Marion Cox, Jennings Vereen, Ronnie Nobles, Bobby Todd, "Termite" Williamson, William "Pompano" Elliot, "Bucky" Elliot, Corbin "Spider" Elliot, Joe Livingston, Michael Brown, Thomas Gore, "Winkie" Mintz, Johnnie McCorsley, Russell Carter, L.D. Tyler, Jimmy Bessent, Tommy Bessent, George Bessent, Richard Sanders, and Herman Humphries. Frank Juel would hire vacationing college students on his boats.

Hugh McGinn was only peripherally involved in the recreational fishery. As a young man he worked for the Corps of Engineers, was a hard hat diver and worked with underwater repairs and explosives. He finally ended up in the commercial shrimp and fish business at Little River. He did in the 1920s have bateaus which he rented to people and particularly the Corps of Engineers when they were surveying for the inland waterway. He caught and sold bait shrimp to recreational fishermen as a teenager in the '20s. Sometimes he made over $30 in a day selling a gallon paint can full for $1. He carried people river fishing in the '20s and was paid what they wanted to give. He owned a shrimper the **Gilda and Don** and on two occasions took parties on her. He provided fish boxes for the people to sit on. Hugh also had the contract to maintain the buoys and lights for the U.S. Coast Guard at Little River Inlet.[1]

McGinn recalls commercial hand line fishing for black sea bass right after World War II and catching 950 pounds in a day with help from one other man. He also caught 9000 pounds on one trip, potting from his shrimp boat the **Chippewa** in the early 1960s.[1] The **Chippewa** incidentally was one of the boats taken over by the Government in World War II. She had two 50 calibre machine guns mounted on her and a rack for depth charges. Hugh bought her in 1946. He made some remarkable catches with her and finally sold her when he retired in 1971 to Frank Juel along with the fishing facility.

One great story about Hugh appeared in the Myrtle Beach Sun News (Berry 1996c). Hugh was fishing off McClellanville and hit a real, large concentration of shrimp. When he loaded the **Chippewa** he wanted to mark the area, so he could return the next day. Knowing that other boats would come to a bouy, he caught a pelican that had become entangled in his try net and sprayed it with green paint, tied a line with a weight on it to the pelican's foot and threw it over the side as a marker. He came back to this marker for several days- feeding his bird generously with fish after he had gotten another load of shrimp. After the concentration of shrimp moved on he released the pelican. He often wondered what the Wildlife Department would think of a green pelican if it ever came to their attention. Some people envious of Hugh's success claimed he didn't release the bird, but cooked and ate it.

Wayne Henderson has been a fixture on the waterfront for years. He has run a fish house, a clam depuration plant and a restaurant. Over the years he has bought and sold several boats, and on occasion has taken parties on them, but has never really concentrated on this end of the business.[28]

Gus and Steve Speros moved to Little River in 1973 from Maxton, NC. Steve, Gus's son, got a job mating for Captain Frank Juel and in 1976 the Speros bought out Frank. Steve operated the **Scuba** and the **Hurricane** himself for a while. They expanded their business buying the **Thunderbird II** from John Frick and in 1990 the **Captain Jim** from Jimmie Stevens. They also bought Captain Jim's Marina at Calabash, NC from Capt. Stevens. They now operate vessels from Vereen's marina, Calabash, and Southport, NC. Gus passed away in 1996 and Steve now operates the business. He maintains a ticketing office at Little River. The **Hurricane** Fleet as it is now identified offers all types of water related opportunities including half-day inshore trips, Gulf stream parties, trolling trips, shark fishing, dinner cruises, dance cruises, and chartered events.[19] Steve recently bought the Riverside Tavern from the Kinlaws. He plans to sell sundries and open a restaurant on the premises.

L.D. "Tink" Benton became a fixture at Little River in 1980. He bought the hotel, the marina, Mary Juel's old house, and the restaurant that had been operated very successfully by Mary Juel for many years. He bought a 90 foot Aluminum hull vessel, the **Pride of the Carolinas,** about this time and has operated her as a party boat since. She is licensed for 80 pasengers and has been run by several captains beginning with Larry Platt, then Chip Stevens, and for ten years Terry Coffee. In 1997 Danny Juel took her helm. "Tink" had the **Sundancer** built in 1982. She is a 40 footer powered by a 692 detroit diesel and carries charters of up to 20 people. The **Sundancer** is run by Robby Searborough.[29]

Mr. Benton has had an active advertising campaign designed to bring the crowds back to Little River. He uses at times television, newspaper, and beach magazines along with brochures to draw attention to fishing opportunities at his operations.[29]

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 Jimmie 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.[23]

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.[1,4]

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 Hogg** and **Virginia R** to his fleet. The **Boss Hogg** 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.[1,4]

## 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, Rob Mintz, and Liston Thomas made up the party fishing fleet. Fares ran from $.50 to $1 per person for a full days fishing.[1,2,4] 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).[4] 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.

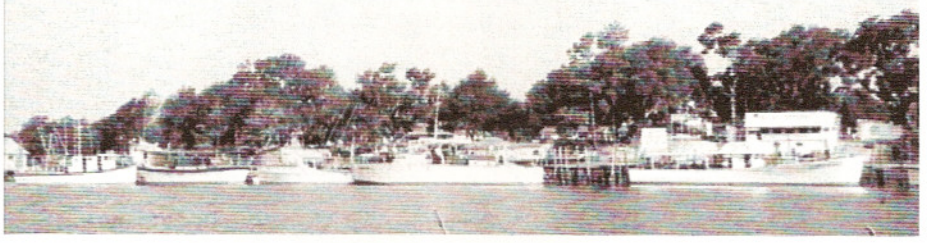
Bearden (1969) reported eleven charter boats and four head boats operating from Little River. He listed costs per day on charter boats at $80 to $200 per day for the boat. Individual costs on the head boats were $8 to $12 for a blackfish trip or $20 for a "Gulf Stream" trip.

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).[30] Head boats charged $26 half-day, $60 for Gulf stream fishing, and $65 for shark fishing.[18] Charter boats ranged from $375 for a half-day trolling to a 16 hour marlin trip



*The Little River fishing fleet prior to Hurricane Hazel in the early 1950s. (photo courtesy Vance Kinlaw)*



*The Little River docks in 1960 showing most of the boats. (photo by Jack L. Thompson from Along the Coast, 1960)*

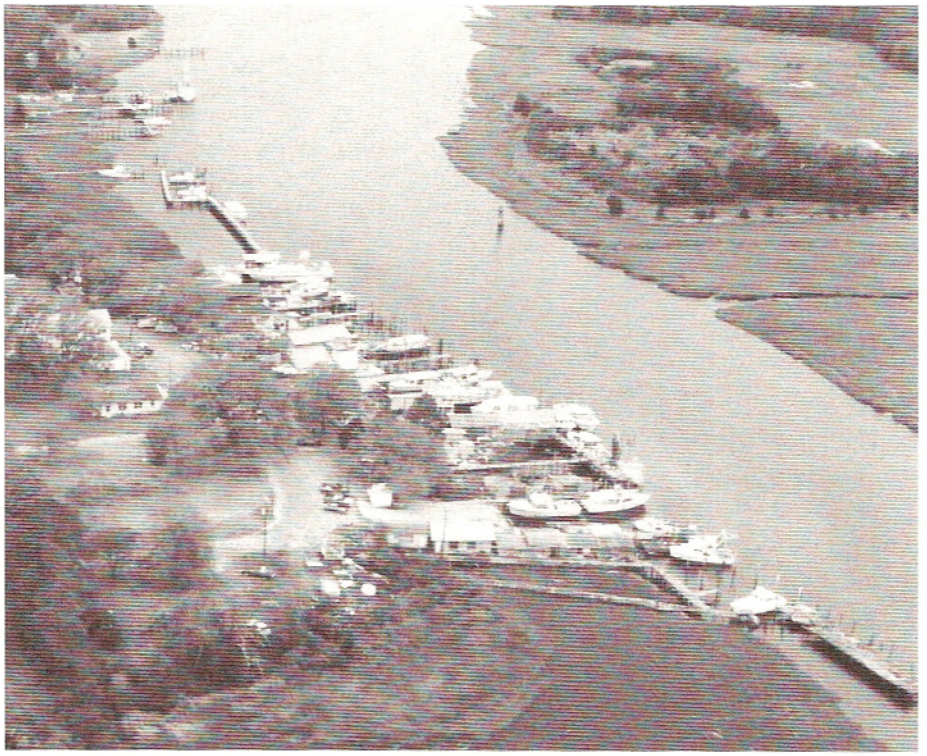
for $1200. Moonlight cruises were $8 per person with dinner cruises, ocean cruises and a variety of other sea going excursions offered. Only one large head boat is fishing out of Little River in 1997. This is the 90 foot **Pride of the Carolinas** and it concentrates on half-day trips during the week 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 overnight trips to the snapper-grouper banks.[4,8] 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 further 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,b, 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, warsaw, snowy, gag and scamp groupers, rock and speckled hind, tile fish, porgies and grunts (Huntsman 1976a,b).

Fishing for pelagics by trolling



*The Little River docks in the late 1970s. (photo courtesy of Jack L. Thompson, Myrtle Beach, SC)*




*A catch of black sea bass on the* ***Rascal****, mid 1950's. 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 by a party fishing in the Gulf Stream on Frank Juel's* ***Hurricane****, mid 1950s. (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)*

boats takes place from almost in the breakers for Spanish mackerel to the outer shelf for marlin, sailfish, and yellow fin 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.[4,12]

River fishing catch varies by time of year with best spot, 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

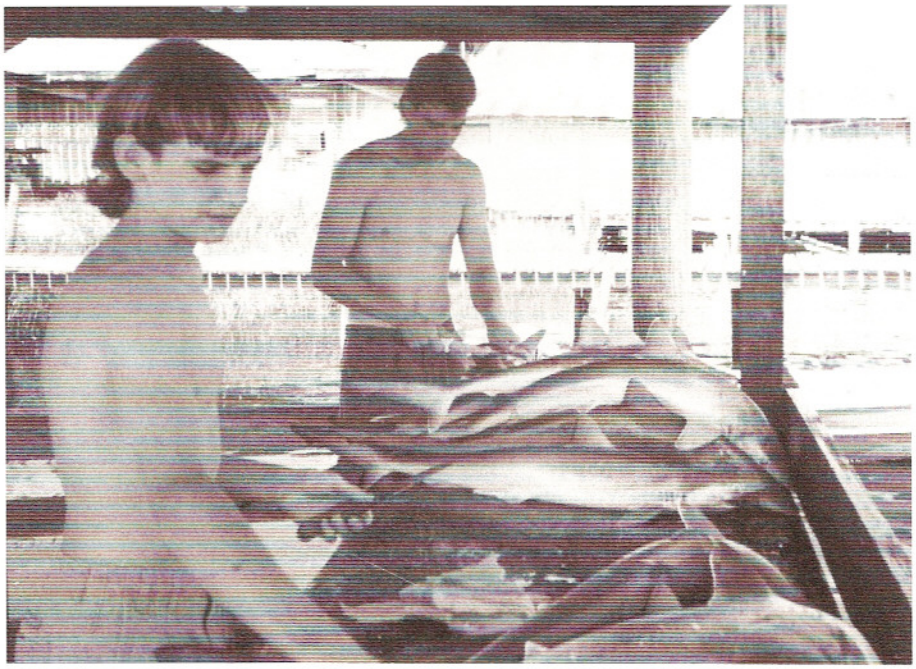
The earliest fishermen were out to catch the most and the largest fish possible. They were referred to as "meat fishermen." Sometimes a group would come from upstate North Carolina or South Carolina prepared to take home really large catches of fish, even a pickup truck load. At first some of these fish 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.[2]

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 Juels on several occasions. On one trip in the 1950s she bought back 47 blackfish which probably weighed nearly 100 pounds.[31] Faye Mintz fishing in the 1960s with her father in law, Rob Mintz, caught 177 spot on a river trip.[32] In the fall, many times, a party would catch several 50 pound lard stands full of spot fishing in the river.[4]

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 nine-thirty am 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.



*Mates or strikers on the boats often supplemented their pay and tips by dressing the party's fish. The two in this picture are cleaning sharks caught by Larry Long's party. (photo courtesy of Larry long)*




*A catch of black sea bass in the mid 1950s. These fish would sometimes be given away, but most often would be carried home to freezers for winter time consumption. (photo from the Dunnegan Collection)*

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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 ten pounds per angler when bottom fishing inshore.[26] A new size limit of 10 inches total length on black seabass will further reduce the number of fish bought back (Gaulden 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 90percent are released alive. Red drum size and bag limits along with tagging has been responsible for a strong recovery of this species (Keepfer 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.[4] When not in use these were wound on a short piece of wood. Some of the boats had grooves worn in the rail from the dropping and retrieving of these lines. After World War II rods and reels came into general use the first rods were made of split bamboo and then later fiberglass. The hand lines were always provided free, but at first the rod and reels were rented for a small fee. Later rods and reels were provided gratis, and the hand lines phased out. Bait was usually salted squid, octopus, or cut up fish or salt pork and was furnished by the boat.

Riverboat fishermen used hardlines at first, but with smaller hooks and weights, but then they all went to rods and reels. Their bait was most often frozen shrimp that had been thawed.

Charterboats used rods and reels when trolling from the beginning. These used linen line at first, but then went to nylon, then Dacron or Monel. These rigs always used stainless steel leaders and various lures or a rigged bait made from whole fish or cut strips.

The Gulf Stream boats first used three hand lines tied end to end and only one hook. Soon these were supplemented by rods with hand reels and then electric reels and also a crank reel that was made from a bycycle rim and pedals. Heavier sinkers and larger hooks were used.[8] Bait again was usually salted or frozen squid provided by the boat (Huntsman 1976a).[8]

Later on light tackle was introduced by the individuals chartering boats. Some of these fishermen used spinning rigs.

Charters specializing in shark fishing use heavy gear with very powerful reels.

Many of the charter boats also rigged out two short hand lines with a rubber link or a piece of shock cord to keep the fish on the line. These were pulled from the stern and fished shorter than the regular trolling lines. 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 1988a).

Navigation prior to the late 1940s was done with a watch and compass. The fishing banks were found by steering a set course for a given length of time. When in vincinity 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 bouy was set. These bouys usually were a 10-12 ft bamboo pole with a cloth flag at the top, a cork float a quarter of the way up from the bottom of the pole and a weight attached to the end opposite the flag to hold the flag erect. Bouys 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 bouy 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 fish finders which showed fish on a cathode ray screen. This made finding fish easier especially at the Gulf Stream. LORAN was the next navigational 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 such as when marlin fishing.

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 shutting them off and starting them back up in reverse. Two popular makes were Palmer and Lathrop, but there were many others.[1,4] Automobile engines were popular during the thirties as well as marine engines built by Chrysler, Gray, Sterling and Continental. Conversion kits were available that were specific for certain automobile engines. Popular kits made by Osco and Barr Mfg provided jacketed manifolds for cooling, flame arrester carburetors, oil coolers and reduction gears. Many people just used the automobile engines as they were with the same gear box.[4]

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.[2]

With the passage of the Merchant Marine Act of 1956, the gasoline powered boats were relegated to carrying six or less passengers due to fire hazzards. As time went by, more and more boats went to diesel so that now just about all the boats in the fishery use this power. Popular diesel engines over the years have been GM 671s and 110s, Cummings, and Caterpillar. As boats got larger and speed was needed to get to the fishing areas faster, V12s were employed. Now popular engines are 600 hp Detroit diesels and 892 GM's up to 735 hp.

River boats first got to the fishing spots by oar power. In the mid-thirties outboards came into use by some. These early engines were somewhat unreliable and no one left the dock without a good set of oars. My uncle had a 2 ½ hp "Waterwitch" which was sold by Montgomery Ward for less than $100. To my knowledge it never made a round trip to the fishing area around Tilgemans Point near the mouth of the inlet. Hugh McGinn recalls operating an eight horse Elto outboard in 1927 for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It had a hot shot battery and was hand cranked in forward or reverse by a knob on the fly wheel. None of these engines got into the fishery so far as anyone can remember. Hugh McGinn did buy a 10 hp Johnson in 1940 for $160 which he used in the river.[1] All outboard engines up until the fifties had integral gasoline tanks and were hand started with a pull cord wound around the fly wheel. From the early fifties most river fishermen began to use larger outboards (10-18 hp). In the sixties they got up to 35 hp and some were electric started. Rob Mintz always had inboards on his river boats. First a one cylinder Lathrop and then a six cylinder Continental.

Vance Kinlaw and Sam Vereen rented wooden 16-18 ft boats to anglers for river fishing. At one time during the '30s the fee was $1 per day.[1,7]

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 refloated 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.[4]

## Off Season Employment

The first party boat fishermen had to depend more on their off season activities to make a living than the summer recreational fishery. In the beginning party fishing was confined pretty much to the period corresponding to the school vacations, Memorial Day to Labor Day. After the party boat fishing season many of them converted their boats over to shrimping.[4,17] 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.[4] Late in the fall some fishermen moved from the beach seine fishery to the river to set gill nets for spot and stop seines for flounder. Victor Cox ran his boat the **Edward** through Sheep Head Creek to carry fish caught in Lucian Bryan's beach seine on Waties Island to market in the mid-1920s. The fish were salted and packed in 100 pound kegs.[1] 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.[1] Seafood on many occasions during the 1930s Depression was bartered for farm products.[4,17]

Following World War II more opportunities 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.[8] This group included Frank Juel, Jimmy Stevens, Olin Carter, Leroy Mintz, Danny Juel, and others. Some such as Victor S. Cox, Victor E. Cox, and Hugh McGinn and again Leroy Mintz went south with the shrimping fleet, Leroy and Hugh operating their own boats and Coxes building nets for others.[1,3,4,33]

Victor Sloan Cox and Victor Earl Cox opened an oyster shucking house in the mid-fifties. They shucked oysters using the Pringle Heat Shuck method and packed them first in glass jars and then lithographed tin cans. These were distributed in the Pee Dee South Carolina area by me. After the Coxes got out of the business, Donnie Mintz took over their trade and ran a shucking house up until the 1970s.

Jerome Long was a skilled boat builder and spent his off season repairing or building boats for others. He was also a very good barber and operated a shop in the building that Dr. Stone used for an office. Lawrence Long spent two of his winters building his own boat the **Cheryl Ann**.

In 1960 Frank Juel initiated blackfish potting. He was very successful in catching fish, but not very good at making a profit at it. He recalls selling nearly a hundred boxes of blackfish for $12 per 100 pound box.[8] Lawrence Longs' sons Larry, Billy, and Ricky have continued blackfish potting and the economics involved are much better now.[12,13,16,34]

Of course every boat owner and many operators devoted much of their spring to getting boats ready for the summer season. The season also has been extended so that many are taking parties as late as November and as early as March.

## The Fishermen

Very early, local people began to come to Little River probably to fish or to help with the haul seines at Waties Island. Later folks from around the Charlotte, Gastonia areas of North Carolina started coming to the Little River area. They camped on the waterfront and sometimes 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 this part 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.[1,4,8,9]

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 Wampee, 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 a 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 mid-and upper South Carolina. The Intracoastal Waterway bridge also linked up what is now Highway 17 and made access from Myrtle Beach and other areas much easier.[1,9] 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 S. 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 over 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 began 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 him ashore. He was very contrite when the alcohol wore off and he sneaked out of the hospital and went home. Shortly thereafter he collapsed and apparently died of kidney failure (Dunnegan 1994).[8]

One time Frank had a man aboard the **Hurricane** who had to put his wife on a trolling boat because she 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 her on the radio he tried to make her sick by talking about all kinds of queasy 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 offered the man a bite. Guess who got seasick.[8]

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. They were put on ice in 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 no longer takes a whole day for a trip to the blackfish banks.

A fisherman does not expect to feed his family all winter on the catch from just one or two trips as he did in the '30s, but is happy with a small string and a pleasant day. Tag and release is the norm for many species and all are concerned with doing what they can to persevere and increase the stocks of fish.

The river front is no longer a mad house of people looking for a place on a vessel or captains soliciting parties every morning during the summer season. Ticket offices handle most of the business for the headboats and most of the charter trips are booked by telephone. The season is not just from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but from March into November.

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 however for the $1 rooms at the Little 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 that flourished up until the eighties all have about called it a day. The third group, some of the sons of the first and second contingent, are now the old guard. A new generation is on the way. Some are first becoming owners and captains and others are mates learning the ropes.

Like everything that has survived for 75 years, the party fishing at Little River has changed, but in many ways remained the same. The old crowd has made way for the newcomers and the old boats have been replaced by the new, but every year finds old and new customers boarding the boats eagerly anticipating what the day will bring. When the 100th anniversary of the founding of the fishery comes around early next century, sons and maybe daughters of the present captains will surely be carrying out a new generation of fishermen.

## Acknowledgements

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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.

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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 Vivan 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.