

# Soundside Learning

## This Week On Core Sound

### Core Sound On Canvas Returns

Program blending art, history spotlights Portsmouth Village

In 1753, the North Carolina Colonial Assembly passed an act aimed at “laying out a Town on Core Banks, near Ocracoke Inlet, in Carteret County...”. In those days, and since the shoaling of Currituck and Roanoke Inlets, Ocracoke Inlet had become the only viable inlet through which essential goods bound for inner North Carolina could pass.

Still, vessels attempting to traverse Ocracoke Inlet were in need of pilots, those individuals so experienced with the navigation of the inlet’s shoals and tides and capable of guiding these cargo-laden ships safely through. One of the issues, however, was the lack of available pilots in the immediate vicinity of the inlet. The solution, as colonial officials saw it, was to organize a town and offer parcels of land for sale in the hopes of attracting pilots and their families to settle; and from which would spring the infrastructure and services so needed by the merchant mariners using the nearby inlet. The town was to be called Portsmouth.

From 1753 to the turn of the 20th century, Portsmouth grew. Pilots and their families *did* put down roots, deep and sturdy, generations strong. Eventually, wharves, warehouses and other services would develop on Portsmouth. Men worked as pilots, or in “lightering” whereby merchant vessels would transfer their cargo to smaller vessels, thus lightening their load and allowing them to cross the inlet’s shallow waters. From the beginning, Portsmouth was well stocked with Styrons, Gaskins, Dixons, Gaskills, Fulchers and Gilgos. Their ancestors can be found today, across Core Sound in communities like Cedar Island, Atlantic, Sea Level, or Davis. Still, for them, Portsmouth is *home*.

*Core Sound on Canvas*, in the wake of the 2022 Portsmouth Homecoming celebration, highlighted the history of this Core Sound settlement with a night of stories from descendants of those Portsmouth Islanders followed by a painting of the Portsmouth Methodist Church. Built in 1916 after a hurricane had destroyed the previous structure, the church stands today as a symbol of Portsmouth, its people, and their resilience.



Portsmouth’s Methodist Church  
Photo: CSWM&HC Collection



Upcoming Events:  
Summer 2022!

CORE SOUND  
ON CANVAS

FRIDAY, JULY 29th

Down East native and artist, Willis Irvine, will return for our summer session as we celebrate one of Down East’s most beloved sites, Smyrna Ballfield. Come learn about the Down East “Field of Dreams” from the fans, players, and others who know what it meant to “play ball” on that hallowed, beloved ground.

Registration for this event is \$25 per painter, or free for those who only wish to enjoy the stories and food.

# The Sounds Coming From “The Sound”

Excerpt From: *The Education of an Island Boy* by Joel G. Hancock

*Throughout the longest days of summer, it was not uncommon to be awakened on a "slick cam" morning by a din of hollering coming from well beyond the shore at the Landing. Sometimes we would run down the path to look toward that distinctive yet familiar sound. Frequently, out towards the Island channel, could be seen a host of small dories heading out from a much larger fishing vessel.*

*The voices that had pierced the morning were the sound of crewmen, mostly African Americans, working on a "shad boat" that had found a school of menhaden in the deeper water that was just a few hundred yards from the shoreline. Almost always, after their catch had been surrounded by their net, the "chanteymen" would morph into a musical chorus of brilliant harmonies even while they tugged on the heavy nets they were charged with hauling aboard.*

*Their ringing voices would echo across the calm water so clearly that it sounded as if they were as near as the foaming water line that marked the incoming tide. "Shad boating" was done on an industrial scale in nearby Beaufort, down the southeast coast to the Florida Keys, and then back along the Gulf of Mexico all the way to Texas. But it required more organization and capital investment than the Islanders of my youth had to offer. Watching the large and coordinated crews of experienced seamen work from a distance was the closest that most of us growing up on the Island ever got to being part of that culture.*

*The men of Harkers Island were another kind of fishermen. For the most part, they worked hard -- just as hard as those who tugged on the giant purse seines that were carried on the shad boats. But they worked at their own pace and at a rhythm set by their internal clocks rather than by the beat of work song. They deliberately chose to be unshackled by the constraints of bosses, foremen and time clocks.*

*This story is one of many from *The Education of An Island Boy* by Joel G. Hancock of Harkers Island, NC. The new book is slated to be released later in 2022 and will be available for purchase at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center.*



A crew of menhaden fishermen work to haul in the large purse seine.  
Photo: CSWM&HC

**Visitors to the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center should be sure to visit the return of our exhibit, *Raising The Story of Menhaden Fishing...Again*. Come and hear the beautiful melody of those "Chanteymen" and feel the power of an industry to truly raised generations of men and women.**

