

# Soundside Learning

## This Week on Core Sound

### Parlor Talks Return To 806

#### Popular Summer Education Program Reboots

The coming of summer to eastern Carteret County brings with it a general revitalization of our area and, more importantly our people. As May comes to a close and June's sou'westerly gales begin to dominate, harbors teem with anxious fishermen readying shrimp trawlers, sink-netters and long-liners for the hoped for summer bounty of the seas. Evening runs in the family skiff to the banks to stomp for a mess of clams becomes a weekly ritual as our daylight extends into the seven o' clock hour. Some of our more extreme lovers of summer may even welcome the return of the (mostly dreaded) green-head flies.

At the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum summer means the return of our Parlor Talks at 806 Arendell Street in Morehead City. These summer sessions will feature some of our most prominent local historians from Morehead City's own Rodney Kemp, to Harkers Island native Joel Hancock and many more as each session blends history, culture & science to tell the *real* story of Carteret County.

Starting on Thursday, June 16th and running each Thursday at 2:00 PM until September 1st, these programs are free and open to the public, providing a unique glimpse into our area's past told by those who *lived* it. Our first session will feature historian Rodney Kemp as he tells the history of Downtown Morehead City in the days *before* the coming of the sport fishing industry when fish houses and commercial fishermen were the life blood that fed the downtown area.

The full topic schedule for this summer's sessions are as follows:

**June 16th** *Downtown Morehead City*

**June 23rd** *Writings of The Promised Land*

**June 30th** *CC Stargazers: Our Night Skies*

**July 7th** *History of our Menhaden Fisheries*

**July 14th** *"The Tide is Rising"*

**July 21st** *UNC Research: Extreme Events, People, & Places*

**July 28th** *Leaving The Banks*

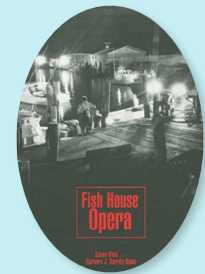
**August 4th** *Cape Lookout Lighthouse*

**August 11th** *Cabin Culture on The Banks*

**August 18th** *Down East Culture*

**August 25th** *Marshallberg Boat Building*

**September 1st** *Stories & Songs We Love*



Sound Reading  
Material For You &  
Your Child

#### *Fish House Opera*

By: Susan West &  
Barbara Garrity-Blake

Fishing families live by the values considered truly American: independence, risk taking and honest hard work. yet in the competition over uses of the sea and protection on its resources, fishermen often become victims rather than equal participants in the search for solutions. *Taking place in 16 "acts" on and beside the broad waters of North Carolina, Fish House Opera offers eloquent testimony on the issues facing commercial fishing families today.*

## No. 17 "Mullet fishing, an old man, and World War I"

From *The Education of An Island Boy* by: Joel G. Hancock Sr.

As I have grown older, there is one recollection of my “mulleting days” that has grown both starker and more wistful in my memory. There was a member of our crew who was at the other end from me when it came to experience. He was old, too old to work for himself. About the only thing he still could offer was to share with me in jumping overboard with the forward staff and pulling on it until the ends were joined. His name was Luther Willis, and he must have been at least seventy years old by the time that we spent a few weeks together as part of Calvin and Neal’s mulleting crew. What I learned from Luther, or more appropriately what I did “not” take the time to learn, has been seared into my psyche as I have thought back on those mornings that we huddled and strained together to pull a cotton net along the sandy bottom of Core Sound.

No matter how hot summer days may be, it is always at least a little chilling to get waist deep in water before the sun has time to warm the morning air. When Luther and I climbed out of the skiff together, holding a wooden staff that he would grab at the top and I at the bottom, we always shivered as we stooped below the waterline. Then, while Calvin and Neal remained in the boat and ran out the net, we would talk about how cold the water was, wonder why the boat was making such a wide turn, or marvel at the beauty of the sun rising over the Banks. Then we would strain together as he reminded me to keep the lead line on the bottom and asked me if I had noticed anything jumping the net. Soon, after just a few minutes of jerking and pulling, he would lose the little energy his old body had left to spend, and would begin to stumble as we headed for the other end of the circle. Then, and several times every morning, he would exclaim to me, almost apologetically, “I just ain’t been the ‘saaaaame’ since France!” Not only that, as he offered his regrets, he would gasp for air at least once in each sentence he uttered. In fact, he hardly ever spoke more than a few words without seeming to struggle for his breath.

As I think back, I must have realized that in referring to “France” he was talking about having been a “dough-boy” who fought in Europe during World War I. I assume I might have known that the cause for his breathing issues would have been exposure to the poison gases that were used by both sides in the trenches of “no-man’s-land.” But what puzzles me now, what bothers me almost to no end, is why in all those hours I spent with him, alone, and with little else to occupy our time, why I never asked him to tell me anything about what his war experience had been like.

I have spent my entire adult life enthralled by the past and by stories. I majored in history at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in college. I have poured through countless books, documents and letters trying to understand, and even write about, how things used to be, and how they affect us even now. But for some reason, I never took advantage of what has proved to have been a once in a lifetime opportunity --- to talk privately and intimately to someone who was on the very cusp of the one event that history has concluded to have been the mid-wife to the turmoil of the entire last century.

Not that this tired and unsophisticated old man would himself have offered any profound insights into the causes or consequences of the “War to End all Wars.” That is not what I feel deprived of. Rather, I lament that I could have had him tell me what it was like to have been drafted into a European War when he had never before left Carteret County. He could have outlined the experience of training for a few weeks and then being herded on board a transport ship for the long ocean crossing. He would have explained the feeling of arriving on the continent and seeing the beautiful “City of Lights” that Paris remained despite the fighting that was less than a hundred miles away.

He might have told of finally learning that his unit was being sent to the front, and of witnessing the devastation that years of scorched earth fighting had wrought on eastern France. How could he have avoided being terrified at the sight of wounded, dead and dying soldiers as he made his way forward to the trenches? He would have explained how he himself became a victim of the mustard gas that permeated the air on both sides of the battlefield. Why was he not wearing the protective gear that is so often seen in pictures of the front? Or, were the fumes so thick that even the protective masks issued by the army could not completely protect him? How was he treated after he was wounded? How long after that was he allowed to come home? What was it like to get back to Harkers Island and to his family?

Those are just some of the thousands of questions that might have been asked, but, at least by me, never were. I assume that he never would have mentioned “France” if he was unwilling to talk about it. Just by raising the subject, he gave me the opportunity to pursue my interests in any direction I wanted. But that is the point, at that time in my life I must not have had any interest beyond catching some fish, making some money, and enjoying my life as a young teenager on Harkers Island. I wish I had it to do over.

