

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

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-



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)

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

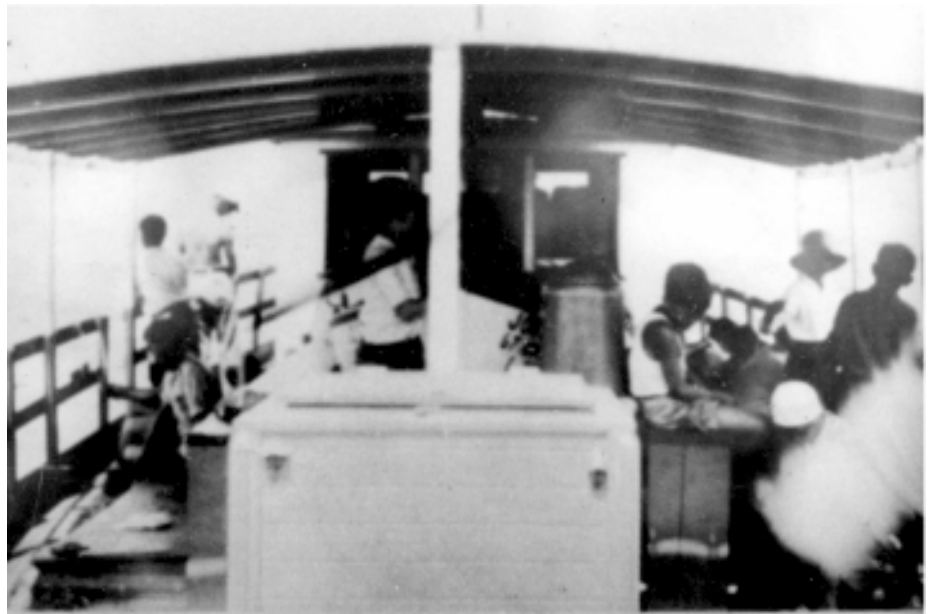
The intracoastal waterway was begun in the late '20s and completed in 1936 (Lewis 1988c). Construction of this project led to more people coming into the area to work. These laborers from other places needed housing and board. Places catering to them also were available to fishermen and vacationers. 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 **Josephine** was hired to go up the Pee Dee River to

Mars Bluff, S.C. near Florence to pick up campers for a session at the YMCA Camp Nixon located at Cherry Grove Beach. This further enhanced her reputation.

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



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



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)

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 fish-

ing 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 Bessent in part-



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



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



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



The **Hobby** owned by 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 jet-ties were in place, in 1983, boats could cross the bar at any time of day. A family could have an outing without taking up an entire day and coming back worn out from a full day at sea. Gradually the half-day trips came to dominate the blackfish party business.

Trolling or “charter” boats were generally concentrating on Spanish mackerel, blue fish, king mackerel, dolphin, some cobia, bonita, and a few little tuna up to the early sixties. Boats and captains who wintered in Florida, taking a cue from the sport fishery there, began around 1960 to rig out for sailfish and other large pelagics and the fishery then included big game fishing boats along with the “inshore” trolling boats. The period 1955 to 1975 marked the heyday of

the Little River recreational fishery.^{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). These 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

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 management 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 intra-coastal 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 so-

lited 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 already



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)

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 di-

rected them back to Highway 17 and told them to head north and they would see the big boats on their right. He did not mention the fact that he was referring to the US Navy "moth-ball" merchant fleet anchored at Wilmington, NC some 55 miles distant.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 worked 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 charts her during the summer to recreational fishermen and pots for black sea bass in the off season. (photo from the author)

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