

# our stories

A LOOK AT HAMPTON ROADS HISTORY



**paul clancy**

Paul Clancy, a former staff writer for *The Pilot*, is the author of "Ironclad: The Epic Battle, Calamitous Loss, and Historic Recovery of the USS Monitor," "Historic Hampton Roads: Where America Began" and "Hampton Roads Chronicles: History From the Birthplace of America."

## history blog

To read past columns, news stories or view historic photos from *The Pilot*, check our blog at <http://hamptonroads.com/blogs/back-day>.

## PICTURE THESE: ONLINE PEEKS AT NORFOLK'S PAST

ONE OF THE MOST interesting parts of writing a history column is finding illustrations to go with them. Sketches, often from Harper's Weekly and other Civil War-era magazines, frequently are available online. And photos? What a joy it is to find the right historical image. Among the best places to look for old pictures are the Norfolk Public Library's digital photo archives and the Virginia Beach Public Library's Edgar T. Brown postcard collection. Another is the Library of Congress, especially for Civil War photos and, curiously, child labor conditions.

A tremendous resource for nautical pictures is The Mariners' Museum in Newport News. For old Navy ships and planes, the Naval Historical Center in Washington is the place to look.

Now there's a new source: Two years ago, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority decided to drag dusty boxes of photographs, negatives and slides out of storage and digitize them. It was a huge job, sometimes requiring the images to be restored first. But when it was over, more than 14,000 photos had been scanned and made available online at <http://nrha.photoshelter.com>. The images are in high-resolution format, and they're searchable.

In other words, you can search for all photos of, say, Atlantic City, Ghent, downtown or, more generally, slums. These last pictures, before Norfolk's massive slum clearance projects, are extensive and heartbreaking.

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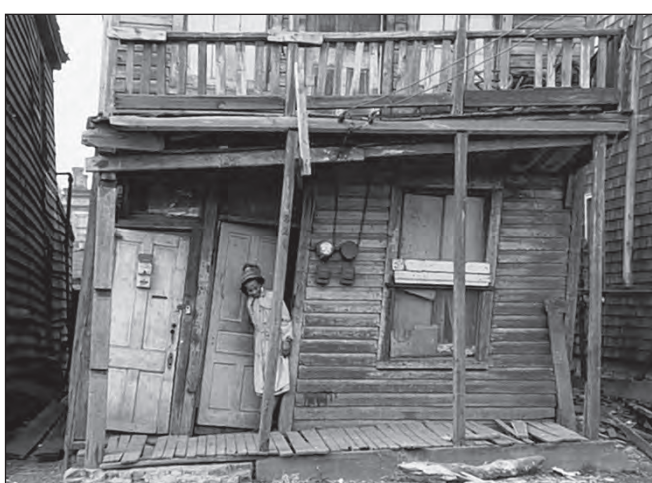
## Oyster Dock

There are lots of shots of the old waterfront, including this one of the Oyster Dock, once the center for ship stores and imported goods, taken in 1875.



## war boom

Norfolk's population surged from 137,500 in 1939 to 305,121 in 1943 as a result of World War II. Left: In 1945, crowds pour out onto Granby Street.



## notorious slums

Norfolk's slums, before massive urban renewal efforts in the 1950s, were described as the worst in the nation. This undated photo shows a girl emerging from a house on Smith Street in the Young Park area.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NORFOLK REDEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING AUTHORITY

## this week in history

These were some of the stories reported by local papers the week of Nov. 13:

### 1986

**Fifteen passengers** are shaken but unhurt after the right landing gear of a TWA 727 collapses after touchdown at Norfolk International Airport. The jet skids for more than 2,000 feet, with its fuel-filled right wing tearing into the apron and sending up clouds of smoke before coming to rest about halfway down the airport's main runway. The accident causes headaches for travelers and dozens of flights to be canceled and rerouted.

**Old Dominion University's** Darden School of Education building is closed after asbestos is discovered among debris from a renovation project. School officials say the building, where more than 2,000 students attend classes daily, will not reopen until it is cleaned and all asbestos residue is removed.

### 1961

**A series of explosions** heard and felt in the Tidewater area cause plate-glass windows to shatter, plaster to crack, water pipes to burst and sensitive-eared dogs to run amok. Naval officials, police desk sergeants and journalists spend most of their day taking phone calls from concerned citizens. No one seems to know – or will admit knowing – the source of the blasts.

### 1911

**The Pure Food show**, sponsored by retail grocers in the area, opens at the Fergus Reid building on Granby Street, and the public is invited to a 12-day exhibit, the largest of its kind ever to be held in the South. Admission costs 15 cents, and the show will give away thousands of dollars' worth of food samples. In addition, applications are sought from any couple willing to get married at the show on its last day. In return, the couple is to receive housekeeping items worth \$300.

**Norfolk's Industrial Commission** is advised that the streets leading to Maury High School are poorly lit and in bad condition. When the commission is told that the State Educational Association will hold sessions there soon and the school also is being used for night classes, it decides to make efforts to have the conditions of the streets remedied.

**St. Mary's Orphanage** holds its benefit tag and button sale. The tags are sold from 12 stands set up around Norfolk. Two years ago, about \$1,200 was collected.

– Compiled by Maureen Powers Watts, *Pilot* news researcher

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## REGION AT A GLANCE

### ONE DEAD AND THREE INJURED IN UNRELATED SHOOTINGS

NORFOLK | Three people were injured and one man was killed in three unrelated shootings late Friday and early Saturday, a police spokeswoman said.

Two of the shootings were reported hours apart in the same vicinity, one near The Gallery at Military Circle and the other across the street near the Janaf Shopping Yard.

Police were called to the 5900 block of East Virginia Beach Blvd., near Janaf, around 1:55 a.m. after someone reported a man suffering from a gunshot wound. Anderson Britt, 42, was taken to Sentara Norfolk General Hospital, where he died, police said.

Less than two hours later, officers were called to the 800 block of North Military Hwy. when someone reported two women suffering from gunshot wounds. They were taken to the hospital for wounds that were described as non-life-threatening, officials said.

At 11:15 p.m. Friday, police responded to reports of a man being shot at the 700 block of St. Paul's Blvd. He, too, was taken to the hospital for treatment of non-life-threatening injuries.

– Mike Hixenbaugh, *The Pilot*

### Click It or Ticket POLICE BEGIN SEAT BELT CAMPAIGN

Beginning this weekend, Virginia State Police and local law enforcement officers will conduct a Click It or Ticket enforcement and education seat belt usage campaign.

The campaign runs Sunday through Nov. 20, according to a state police news release.

While troopers and other officers are enforcing other traffic laws, they plan to pay special attention to seat belt and child safety restraint usage, according to Col. W. Steven Flaherty, state police superintendent.

As of Oct. 31, at least 257 people who weren't restrained had died in crashes, according to state police. Last year, 307 people who were not buckled up died in crashes.

Last year, troopers wrote 26,797 tickets for adults not buckling up and 7,135 tickets for children not being properly restrained.

– Cindy Clayton, *The Pilot*

### Suffolk FREE SCREENINGS FOR DIABETES AVAILABLE

Free diabetes screenings will be available at Sentara Obici Hospital from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday and on Nov. 22.

The hospital is collaborating with the Eastern Virginia Medical School Strelitz Diabetes Center to provide the screenings and to educate the community about Type 2 diabetes.

– Amy Jeter, *The Pilot*

### Suffolk TWO SKYDIVERS HURT BY HARD LANDING

Two skydivers were rushed to the hospital after reportedly making a hard landing Saturday night at Suffolk Executive Airport.

WAVY-TV news quoted Suffolk police spokeswoman Debbie George as saying that the parachutists were injured just before 7 p.m., and their chute had no problems.

Sentara Nightingale helicopter ambulance flew one of the skydivers to Sentara Norfolk General Hospital while an ambulance took the other to a local hospital, George said.

– Corinne Reilly, *The Pilot*

## VIRGINIA NEWS

### Weak, dying Bay oyster population is end for skipjack captain's career

By Teresa Tomassoni  
*The Washington Post*

Standing at the helm of his 106-year-old skipjack, Captain Barry Sweitzer steered into the pre-dawn dark, eager to pull his first catch of the season from the northern Chesapeake Bay. All summer, he'd been counting down the minutes until this day.

"I was ecstatic," he said. But as soon as the first batches of oysters were hauled onto the oystering boat's deck, Sweitzer knew his season was over. Of the 250 oysters caught in that initial "lick," or pass over an oyster bed, 11 were alive.

"The oyster industry in the northern Bay is gone," he said.

Maryland's Department of Natural Resources confirmed last week that at least 74 percent of the oysters north of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge died in the spring from record-high freshwater flows into the Bay from the Susquehanna River. The Bay, bordered by Maryland and Virginia, is the largest estuary in the United States, with numerous rivers and streams emptying into it.

More recent flooding from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee also might have killed some oysters, which rely on salty waters to survive, said Mike Naylor, the department's shellfish program director.

Only 2 percent of the Bay's oyster harvest comes from the upper Bay, where about 30 watermen dredge for oysters between the Magothy and Patapsco rivers. So the effect of the die-off will be minimal to the overall industry, Naylor said.

But as the only skipjack captain who works in the hard-hit area, Sweitzer says, the loss means that his oystering career has ended. And so has a family legacy. After catching barely two dozen live oysters Nov. 2 – compared with more than 100 bushels on the first day of last year's season – he laid off his crew and put the Hilda M. Willing up for sale.

Poor water quality, over-harvesting and diseases have been killing off oysters in the Bay for decades, bringing the population to less than 5 per-

# 74%

At least 74 percent of the oysters north of Maryland's Chesapeake Bay Bridge died in the spring from record-high freshwater flows into the Bay from the Susquehanna River. Luckily, only 2 percent of the Bay's oyster harvest comes from that part of the bay.

cent of its level in the 1800s, said Mark Bryer, director of the Nature Conservancy's Chesapeake Bay Program.

It will take years of restoration efforts to repopulate the area with oysters, Naylor said. Until then, some species that depend on the oyster reefs as feeding grounds will be affected, including rockfish and blue crabs.

But the monetary loss isn't even the most heartbreaking aspect of the die-off, said Sweitzer, who is 50. The worst part, he said, is, "It's a way of life that's disappearing."

Sweitzer's father, Robert F. Sweitzer, bought the skipjack in 1947 and worked as its captain for 53 years to support his wife and five children.

The Willing, named in memory of the builder's deceased daughter, was constructed in 1905, about 10 years after oyster-dredging boats began to dot the Bay. Their high-water mark lasted about 20 years. In all, it's believed that about 2,000 skipjacks were made, designed to navigate the shallow waters where oyster reefs lie, according to the National Park Service's Maritime Heritage Program.

When Robert Sweitzer wasn't out on the water, he was repairing the boat, said his son, who remembers watching his father strip the bark off an eastern pine tree in the family's yard on Tilghman Island to fashion the boat's 40-foot boom, which supports the mainsail.

In 2000, Sweitzer took out a loan and bought the boat from his father for \$30,000. Since then, he has captained the ship two days a week, weather permitting, during the November-through-March oyster season,

supplying Deep Creek Restaurant and Marina near Annapolis and Virginia wholesalers with fresh catches. During the off-season, he does as his father did, spending hundreds of hours working on his boat. (He also works as a marine officer with the Baltimore County police.)

In 2000, skipjacks were named Maryland's official state boat. The Willing, stout and sturdy and in better shape than most of its aging counterparts, did its colleagues one better, earning designation as a National Historic Landmark. It even has its own entry on Wikipedia. But most of the surviving wooden boats have deteriorated over the decades, leaving only six commercial oyster-dredging skipjacks on the Bay.

On Tuesday, Sweitzer and crew member Kelly Sullivan took a final voyage to the upper Bay oyster beds to show a reporter what they had found the previous week.

Sullivan, 24, lowered one of the boat's two 4-foot-long, iron-toothed rakes into the bay. The dredges drag along the bottom of the Bay, scooping oysters. Armed with gloves and kneepads, Sullivan hauled up the dredge after a few minutes and, on his hands and knees, sifted through the pile of broken, semi-attached and empty shells, pushing the dead ones back into the Bay and setting aside a few he thought might be alive.

But as he tapped each "questionable" oyster with a cull hammer, most cracked open to reveal hollow interiors. He tasted a rare live one and cast the shell into the Bay with disgust.

"That was horrible compared to last year," he said of the bland and bitter flavor of the shell's usually salty meat.

After Sweitzer docked his boat for the last time at the Deep Creek restaurant, Rene Hundemann, a co-owner, greeted him.

"We're going to miss you," she said. Some regulars have mused about wanting to pool their money to turn the boat into a sunset cruise ship.

But Sweitzer wants to keep his boat in the business it was made for, even if he can't run it himself. He hopes a waterman based in the lower Bay will buy it before it slips away into history.

In more than a century, the ship has never missed an oystering season, he said.

"It's a workboat, and it needs to go to work."



**BUSINESSES**  
Buyrn & Crook \$100.00  
Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority \$1,200.00

**CLUBS & ORGANIZATIONS**  
Toyota Charity Bowl football game \$50.00  
Toyota Charity Bowl football game \$75.00  
Toyota Charity Bowl football game \$75.00  
Toyota Charity Bowl football game \$75.00  
Navy Wives Clubs of America Princess Anne 143 \$100.00  
Toyota Charity Bowl football game \$250.00

**INDIVIDUALS**  
In memory of Sarah and Saul Glickman \$35.00  
Gloria B. Richardson and granddaughters MyKayla and Kristen Moore \$35.00  
In honor of Betty and Don Mayo \$50.00  
In memory of Katie Cooper \$50.00  
John and Juanita Burns \$50.00

In memory of Blossom, Cake and Gates families \$50.00  
In loving memory of our son, Korbin \$50.00  
RIP loved ones \$100.00  
In loving memory of Lee W. Rivers \$100.00  
In memory of our parents from Darrell and Jean \$100.00  
In loving memory of our son, J. Kendall Whitaker III \$200.00  
Merry Christmas – Suzanne C. Vroom \$200.00  
Boyd Foundation \$500.00

**Overall Total \$18,591.00**