CHAPTER TWO
THE SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY IN WASHINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

In 1975 the North Carolina Division of Archives and History and the Historic American Engineering Record jointly published North Carolina: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites. No shipyards are included in this publication. An examination of the literature on the maritime history of North Carolina also reveals that very little has been written about boat and shipbuilding.1 This lack of information about shipbuilding is surprising, because it has been an important industry in eastern North Carolina since the colonial period. Until the twentieth century one of the state's major shipbuilding centers was located at Washington.2

Considerable boat and shipbuilding went on in North Carolina during the colonial period. The concentration of the colony's populace along the water routes made it inevitable that small craft — row boats, canoes, perriaugers, and small sailing vessels — would be built for local transportation. Larger vessels were built for trade with the English colonies in North America and the West Indies, but the number evidently was small compared to the other colonies. Of 229 vessels constructed between 1710 and 1739 and trading with North Carolina, only 38 were built within that colony.3 The majority of those launched were single masted sloops, although schooners and a few brigs were also built.

Settlers who located along the Pamlico River developed shipbuilding there quite early. In 1706 Jacob Bodett, a shipwright, purchased some 320 acres on the north side of the river, although records do not indicate whether or not he built a ship. However, the following year Governor Thomas Cary contracted with Thomas Harding of Bath to build "at his landing in Bath Creek one sloop, 46 feet by the keel, 18 feet by the beam ...." Harding was to do all the ship carpenter work and Cary was to furnish the lumber, oakum, and other materials.4 Because Bath was the capital of the colony and one of the official ports of entry, it is probable that a number of vessels were built there.5

Washington was founded in the 1770s by James Bonner. The community developed into a port of some importance because of its location at the head of navigation where the Tar River enters the Pamlico. Oceangoing vessels could not ascend the narrow, winding Tar. More


2The two general works are Ursula F. Loy (ed.), Washington and the Pamlico (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1976), hereinafter cited as Loy, Washington and the Pamlico; and C. Wingate Reed, Beaufort County: Two Centuries of Its History (Raleigh, 1962), hereinafter cited as Reed, Beaufort County.


4Reed, Beaufort County, 46.

5British colonial documents, including port entry records, usually reported built in the "plantations," or the "Carolinas," and occasionally in North Carolina, but rarely give the county, community or exact location.
than likely shipbuilding was carried on at this location even before the settlement was established.

As early as the first decade of the eighteenth century some shipbuilding activities were carried on at Bath, a few miles down the Pamlico from the Washington site. Port Roanoke (Edenton), North Carolina customshouse records indicate that a vessel was built near Washington in 1769.6

The outbreak of the American Revolution in 1775 stimulated maritime industries in North Carolina. Although there is some evidence that Washington engaged in privateering activities during the war, no records have been found to indicate whether any of these vessels were built in the small port.

In 1783 Johann Schopf, while touring the newly established United States, wrote, "Washington (is) on the Tar River, a new-settled little place of perhaps 30 houses . . . . The Trade of Washington is as yet trifling; the chief occupation is the building of small ships and vessels; which are put together entirely of pine timber quickly rotting under water, but lasting well above ground." Three years later another visitor wrote, "they are now building here a ship of six hundred hogheads, rather too large, I fancy, for the navigation of this river."7

In the 1780s and 1790s Washington grew rapidly as a trading center. Warehouses and large wharves were erected and the Pamlico River became a beehive of activity as large flats and scows came from upstream on the Tar loaded with tobacco, tar, pitch, turpentine, corn and other commodities. Moored alongside the wharves or anchored in the stream were larger sailing vessels that brought in manufactured goods and that would carry out the locally produced goods.

In 1790 Congress made Washington an official port and established a customs office there. In that year Congress also appropriated $10,000 to build ten revenue cutters, one of which was constructed in Washington. The Diligence, as the cutter was named, was launched in December, 1791, and taken to New Bern to be outfitted.8

The most prominent mercantile firm in the town was owned by John Gray Blount and his two brothers. During these years the firm constructed a number of vessels. In 1789 John Gray contracted with Benjamin Russell to build a ship. At that time he had on the stocks a brig and a sloop.9 But it was a shipwright named Henry Tuley who constructed most of Blount's vessels. The first was launched in 1783 and the last some fifteen years later. They were laid down on sites along the Pungo River and Slades Creek, several miles below the town. Although there are a number of letters from Tuley to Blount in the latter's papers, we know little about the vessels that Tuley built. The best known was the brig Tuley completed in 1798.10 Three of the vessels were named after


3B. Russell to John G. Blount, August 3, 1783; July 23, 1793; December 6, 1793; September 8, 1795; March 3, 1796; June 16, 1796; August 6, 1796, Blount Papers, I, 67; II, 290, 337, 590; III, 30, 66-67, 89. See also Henry Tuley to J.G. Blount, July 4, 1783
the Blount brothers (the brigs John and Richard, and the schooner William), and the William was engaged in the coastal trade with New York City. Blount also acted as an agent for vessels built in Washington and vicinity. In 1799 one was constructed under his direction for a ship captain in Edenton. The captain took her first to Baltimore from where he wrote Blount that her stern "was not well Secured," and he also had to have the ship's bottom coppered. A ship carpenter from Washington by the name of David Adams wrote to Blount that he had a "small schooner on the stocks . . . burthen about 41 tones . . . to send . . . to the West Indies to sell."13

During the first decade of the nineteenth century the shipbuilding industry continued to prosper in Washington. A number of vessels were built, including several large brigs. In 1805 Blount contracted with John Gaylord of Broad Creek to build a brig. Blount agreed to compensate him in money and land. Actual construction was delayed for several weeks because of scarcity of labor. Eventually Gaylord had to travel to Currituck County to obtain workers. His problems did not end there. The brig was launched early in August, but drifted onto a sand bank, gradually filled up with water because of inadequate caulking, and keeled over on her side. It was the end of November before the hull could be pumped out. By this time Gaylord and Blount were involved in a controversy over who would pay for the extra expense. One can assume that the problem somehow was resolved, for the vessel was taken to Washington and completed.15

The growing naval crisis with Great Britain had little direct effect on North Carolina's shipping and shipbuilding industries. The state's foreign trade during these years was small and from 1807 through 1812 did not change drastically. Vessels continued to be built throughout the coastal region including Washington. The 100-ton schooner Young Eagle was launched in 1810, the brigs George Washington and Edwin in 1811, and the full rigged ship Industry in 1812.17 In 1810 Benjamin Davis opened a new shipyard on Broad Creek, and the same year Thomas Trotter wrote that he had entered the shipbuilding business: "I . . . have engaged to finish the Iron Work of a new Ship, and also expect to do the Cabbin work, etc . . . these things are all new to me, but I must be doing something, it is as the saying is a Cash job. . . ." In September, 1810, he wrote, "I have more business than I can do. . . ."18

The crisis with Great Britain prompted efforts to

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11Blount to J.G. Blount, February 2, 8, March 8, April 14, May 8, August 2, 15, September 2, 28, October 21, November 8, 19, 1805, Blount Papers.
13Listed of American-Flag Vessels . . . at the Port of New York, I. 279; II. 746; enrollment papers for the Edwin and the Industry. Certificates of Enrollment, Washington, North Carolina, Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, Record Group 41, National Archives, hereinafter cited as RG41. The enrollment papers are for vessels engaged in the coastal trade. A certificate of registry was required for vessels engaged in the foreign trade. For the years preceding 1812 these records are not an accurate reflection of the shipbuilding industry because only a small percentage of the records have survived. Also for Washington, the records are misleading. The papers frequently say Beaufort County for vessels built in the county; including those built in Washington.
14Gaylord to J.G. Blount, February 2, 8, March 8, April 14, May 8, August 2, 15, September 2, 28, October 21, November 8, 19, 1805, Blount Papers.
15List of American-Flag Merchant Vessels That Received Certificates of Enrollment or Registry at the Port of New York (Washington: National Archives, 1968, 2 volumes), II, 727, hereinafter cited as List of American-Flag Vessels . . . at the Port of New York.
16Christopher Deshom to John G. Blount, May 14, 20, June 11, August 26, 1799, Blount Papers, III, 292, 293, 298, 318.
17The Thomas Jefferson (160 tons) in 1801; the Sally (103 tons) in 1802; and the Jane Williams (150 tons) in 1803. List of American-Flag Vessels . . . at the Port of New York, I, 365; II, 678. The Carolina was advertised for sale in the Norfolk Gazette & Public Ledger, November, 1810.
strengthen naval defenses along the coast. Several small gunboats were built in Smithville, and more were promised for other parts of the coast. In January, 1808, Representative Thomas Blount wrote to the Secretary of the Navy recommending the purchase of two vessels under construction in Washington and their conversion into gunboats. Blount's recommendations were ignored, and when war was declared in June, 1812, the state was still without adequate naval defenses. 19

The outbreak of the war, followed by the British naval blockade of the coast, seriously affected North Carolina's oceangoing shipping. As was the case during the American Revolution, the state's seafarers turned to privateering. Of the four known privateers from North Carolina, one, the Hawk, was out of Washington. Others, however, may have come from the town. In October, 1812, the naval secretary was informed by a North Carolina congressman that Lewis Leroy, a merchant of Washington, "was the only person I know of in this part of the country who has had the spirit . . . to engage in fitting out a privateer. . . . He has now a very fine vessel built for the purpose of 240 tons ready for sea." However, he needed cannon and whether or not they were provided is not known. Washington's shipwrights laid down additional large vessels during the war years that may have been designed as privateers. In May, 1815, A.P. Neale advertised for sale a new 160-ton vessel, and Jonathan Havens contracted to build a 70-foot vessel for a local merchant, Josiah Fowle. 20

When peace came in 1815 Washington's trade revived but shipbuilding remained sluggish. Between 1815 and 1830 only two or three vessels — usually schooners — were built per year. The great majority of vessels that entered the port of Washington were constructed in other states, primarily in New England. 21 Havens and Neal were the major shipbuilders during these years. Havens employed eight workers, principally slaves.

In 1830 Captain Hezikiah Farrow built the first marine railway in Washington. However, he used the facility primarily for repairing vessels. His son, Joseph A. Farrow, constructed the first ship in the early 1840s at this yard. Joseph Farrow would continue to build vessels in Washington until he died in 1906. Other builders during these years were Burton Shipp, William Tannahill, and Hull Anderson. Anderson was a free Negro who owned and operated a shipyard in Washington from 1830 until 1841, when he disposed of his holdings and migrated to Liberia. He owned four slaves who worked for him in the yard. 22 In 1837 Shipp became a partner with Farrow, who afterwards established his own yard. The Tannahill and Lavender firm built the Edmund D. McNair in 1835, the first steamboat constructed in Washington. Of more than thirty vessels engaged in the coastal, inland, and foreign trade that were built in Washington between 1830 and 1850, the Edmund D. McNair was the only steamer.

Steamboats had been plying North Carolina waters since 1817. The first steam propelled vessels were used on the Cape Fear River between Wilmington and Fayetteville and in the intercoastal trade between Norfolk and various North Carolina ports. The Edmund McNair,
However, was the first steamer to operate on the Tar River.

William Tannahill and Benjamin A. Lavender were not shipwrights but local businessmen. They owned a sawmill, four turpentine distilleries, and were also ship chandlers and commission merchants. It was not unusual for North Carolina merchants to build their own steamboats rather than have them constructed in a shipyard. The typical Tar Heel river boat was apparently not difficult to build. The vessel, unlike the western river boat, was plain and practical, a narrow, flat-bottomed hull with a pilot house, and passenger cabin forward, and engine and boiler room aft. The cargo was usually stowed between the two structures. The merchants usually hired a ship carpenter to supervise construction of the hull and superstructure and sub-contracted for the machinery.

In 1845 the *Tarboro Press* reported that "Washington is a delightful place. . . . wharves and shipping give it the appearance of a commercial city. About midway of the River is an island (called the Castle) owned by Abner Neale covered with work shops . . . for shipbuilding. . . ." Two years later the *Washington Whig* wrote, "We are gratified to see that the business of shipbuilding is exciting more and more daily the attention of our citizens. Three vessels have been recently launched here, (including) the schooner *Benjamin F. Hanks* by our young townsman Joseph Farrow." The other two vessels were schooners, both built by one G. Floyd. The *Whig* went on to say that "Besides these Mr. Farrow has two vessels under way at the Railway yard, and two are being built down the river, one by Paul Cornell and the other by E. Ellis."23

The *Whig* described Paul Cornell as a "Master builder," having constructed some forty-six vessels by 1850. He along with his father and brother had migrated from New York to Martin County after the War of 1812 and started a shipyard there. Paul moved to Washington sometime in the 1840s and established a small shipbuilding business just below the town.24

By 1850 Washington had become the most important shipbuilding center in the state. According to the census of 1850 there were twenty-three ship carpenters in Beaufort County — more than in any other county in the state. In an editorial the *Washington Whig* claimed somewhat pretentiously that shipbuilding facilities in Washington were surpassed "by no place on the globe."

This was obviously a gross exaggeration, but Washington and other southern shipbuilding centers could build vessels cheaper than northern yards. In later years this factor would attract northern firms seeking new vessels, but in the pre-Civil War years, the vessels built in Washington were almost exclusively for local merchants and ship owners. For larger ships even the local interests went elsewhere, a factor that nettled the *Washington Whig*. "We learn," the editor wrote in 1853, "that within a few years past seven vessels have been bought at the North by gentlemen living here and put into trade. These vessels probably cost their owners $40,000, every dollar of which has been taken out of the town. Suppose these vessels had been built here. . . . and yet whilst our merchants are going to the North to buy vessels . . . we have every facility for building them here." The paper did not say why the larger vessels were contracted elsewhere. Were northern ships considered better built, particularly for the foreign trade? For whatever reason, a change occurred almost immediately.

23 *Tarboro Press*, March 1, 1845; *Washington Whig*, June 23, 1847.

24 Paul Cornell's father was the uncle of Ezra Cornell, the founder of Cornell University. See Ezra Cornell to Elijah Cornell, March 13, 1817; and John Cornell to Ezra Cornell, February 5, 1833, Cornell Family Papers, Cornell University; *Washington Whig*, September 11, 1850.
A few weeks after the 1853 editorial, the Whig announced that a local builder had received a contract to construct a 200-ton schooner. Shortly after that, the G.R. Dixon, a 209-ton, three-masted schooner was laid down. In 1855-1856, two larger vessels—the 428-ton Pathfinder and the 355-ton Queen of the South were launched. Both of them were three-masted schooners. For a brief time the Queen of the South held the speed record from Mobile to New Orleans. 25

The Washington shipbuilding industry reached its peak years in 1855-1856. Nine schooners, two steamboats, and one flat “carrying 550 barrels” were constructed. There were three marine railways in the town by this date. Farrow had rebuilt and enlarged his old railway; the railway owned by Burton A. Shipp had been bought by I.W. & U.H. Ritch; and the firm of Myers & Company had constructed a new railway of four hundred tons called the Pamlico Railway Company. The latter firm was started by John Myers, a native Pennsylvanian, who opened a mercantile business in Washington in 1825. Although the Myers company would build sailing vessels, it specialized in steamboat construction. 26

In 1857 the nation experienced a financial panic followed by a recession. For the next few years the economy remained sluggish. Investments declined sharply, including the construction of new ships. The gross tonnage of all vessels built in the United States fell by 1859 to one-third of the 1856 total. Although rural states including North Carolina were largely untouched by the recession, the coastal ports such as Washington were affected because of their economic ties with northern ports. The town’s shipping tonnage remained stable, but there was virtually no new ship construction after 1856. Whereas the 1850 census had listed twenty-three ship carpenters, the 1860 census listed only five. 27

The outbreak of the Civil War and the establishment of a blockade by the United States navy clearly hurt Washington’s shipping and shipbuilding industries. The port’s carrying trade with its normal northern markets and the West Indian islands rapidly disappeared. There was some inland transportation for the steamboats, but little work for the sailing vessels. Nonetheless, in the fall of 1861, Joseph Farrow laid down a sixty-foot schooner in his yard. At approximately the same time the keels for two naval gunboats were also laid down.

The Confederate navy contracted for three warships to be built in Washington. In October, 1861, John Myers & Company agreed to construct the hulls of two 130-foot gunboats for $16,000 each, and Ritch and Farrow agreed to build one for $13,200. Only one of the Myers gunboats was actually laid down along with the Farrow & Ritch vessel, and neither was completed. 28 On March 21, 1862, Union naval forces occupied the town. The gunboat on the stocks at Farrow’s shipyard was destroyed, either by

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25 Washington Whig, February 9, March 2, May 25, 1853. The 200-ton schooner was the Mary E. Hoover built by I.W. & U.H. Ritch, Washington Whig, March 12, 1851; List of American-Flag Vessels ... at the Port of New York, 1, 262; Wilmington and Washington enrollment papers, 1854, 1858, RG41.
26 The North Carolina Times (Washington), July 5, 1855; October 8, 1856; Washington Whig, March 12, 1851; Tarboro Southerner, February 23, 1856. Myers has been given credit for building the steamboat Amidas in 1849. However, according to C. Bradford Mitchell this vessel was built in Hartford, Connecticut; see C. Bradford Mitchell (ed.), Merchant Steam Vessels of the United States, 1790-1868 (Staten Island, New York: The Steamboat Historical Society of America, 1975).
28 Report of Evidence Taken Before a Joint Special Committee of Both Houses of the Confederate Congress to Investigate the Affairs of the Navy Department (Richmond, Virginia: G.P. Evans & Co., 1863), 440, 443. Both contractors received partial payments, Ritch & Farrow on January 24, 1862, and Myers, November 28, 1861.
the retreating Confederates or by the Federals. Myers's
gunboat which had already been launched was, according
to the Union naval commander, towed upstream and
burned by the Confederates. 29 Farrow's schooner that was
still on the stocks was not destroyed. Instead a ship
carpenter from the USS Louisiana completed her using
local black shipwrights. She was named the Renshaw and
used by the Union navy until the war was over. After that
she disappeared. Many years later Farrow tried unsuccess-
fully to gain compensation from the government for
her. 30

This ended ship construction in Washington during the
Civil War. Joseph Farrow was impressed into service by
the Confederate government and sent to Wilmington to
work on naval vessels there. John Myers entered the Con-
federate army as a quartermaster. Apparently the yards
remained idle except for occasional repair work on Union
vessels in the river.

The wooden shipbuilding industry declined nationwide
after the Civil War. The decline actually started with the
panic of 1857, and after the abnormal demand for ships
during the conflict, continued in the postwar years. The
rising costs in labor, scarcity of ship timber, and collapse
of the American carrying trade were contributing factors

in this decline. 31 In the southern states, including North
Carolina, the problem was compounded because of the
economic collapse of the former Confederate states.
Capital simply was not available to rebuild shipbuilding
facilities destroyed or damaged by the war. In
Washington the 1870 census listed only one shipyard, the
Joseph Farrow yard with a capital of $2,000 and two
employees. Only five ship carpenters were listed in the
town. The other yards that operated in the port before the
war had disappeared. John Myers & Sons had been
dissolved because of the death of the senior partner, but it
would later be reorganized as John Myers' Sons.
However, the firm would engage only in the shipping
business for several years. For nearly ten years after the
war no vessels of any size were built in Washington. 32 In
1882 a report prepared by the census bureau on the ship-
building industry in the United States stated:
"Washington, North Carolina could build large and good
vessels. There are two yards in the town, but business is
irregular. At one time these yards had 30 men employed,
at another 4 or 5, but since the war there has been little
done here. A schooner of 175 tons and 3 barges were on
the stocks in 1880, and a sloop of 29 tons and 2 steam-
boats of 69 and 97 tons were built." 33

In 1874 John Myers' Sons received a contract to build a
steamer for the Old Dominion Steamship Company.
Named the Pitt this 80-foot paddle wheeler was apparent-
ly the first vessel constructed in Washington after the Civil
War. In the following years the industry gradually reviv-

29 Commander S.C. Rowan to Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, March 27,
1862, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the
30 Stephen F. Blanding, Recollections of a Sailorboy: Or the Cruise of the Gun-
boat Louisiana (Providence, Rhode Island: E.A. Johnson & Co., 1886), 156-159,
172-186. Blanding was the ship's carpenter. In 1901 Farrow brought suit against
the United States government, but was unsuccessful. Congressman John H.
Small then tried to introduce a bill to gain compensation, but the navy disclaimed
any knowledge of the vessel. Affidavits of Joseph A. Farrow, James L. Fowle,
Thos. Judkins and Stanley Tyler, February, 1901; see also John H. Small to W.B.
Rodman, March 6, April 3, 1901, in William Blount Rodman Papers, East
Carolina Manuscript Collection, Joyner Library, East Carolina University,
Greenville, North Carolina, hereinafter cited as Rodman Papers.

31 John G.B. Hutchins, The American Maritime Industries and Public Policy,
1789-1914 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 383-386, hereinafter
cited as Hutchins, American Maritime Industries.
32 Agriculture and Industrial Census for 1870, Beaufort County, North
Carolina, microfilm copy located in Joyner Library, East Carolina University;
Washington Index, July 2, 1867.
33 Henry Hall, "Report on the Ship-Building Industry of the United States," in
United States Census Office, Tenth Census, 1880 (Washington: Government
Printing Office, 1882), VIII, 130.
ed, although construction remained slow. The problems were the same; no demand for wooden sailing vessels and the scarcity of capital. The country was also suffering from a severe depression throughout the late 1870s which aggravated the situation. Between 1865 and 1885 three wooden sailing vessels (two schooners and a sloop), five steamboats, and five barges were built in the port's yards. The R.L. Myers (number one) and Greenville were completed in 1879, the Tarboro in 1880, the Beaufort in 1883, and the R.L. Myers (number two) in 1885. The Tarboro had the distinction of being the "lightest draft hull afloat," and after machinery, boilers and ballast were placed on board, she still drew only eight inches. Her claims were later substantiated by an article in the Scientific American.

The five barges were all for New York interests. In 1881 A.C. King of New York contracted with Myers shipyard to build two 103-foot barges. Low construction costs, compared with building similar craft in northern yards, was the reason why Washington firms received the work. The number of contracts from northern interests would increase during the last years of the nineteenth century. In 1890 a Baltimore shipper arrived in the town to negotiate the construction of several vessels, and in the following years contracts were let with New York and Philadelphia firms.

Construction of vessels for northern interests was one example of the acceleration of shipbuilding during the last decade of the nineteenth century. In fact tonnage built in Washington surpassed the boom period of the 1850s. The Washington Gazette headlined its Christmas, 1893, issue, "Washington Beaufort County, the Ship Building and Fish and Oyster Metropolis of North Carolina." Between 1887 and 1900 at least twenty motorized vessels (steamboats, tugs, gas boats), twenty-four barges, and seven sailing vessels were constructed in the town. This was in contrast to the decline of wooden shipbuilding in other parts of the nation.

There were various reasons for this prosperity. Washington continued to be a regional trading center, although there were changes. Schooners continued to carry goods, primarily lumber, to the West Indies and return with molasses. The coastwise trade which in the past depended upon the small schooners and sloops came more and more to be carried by steamers using the inland water route. Potatoes emerged as a rival to tobacco, cotton, and lumber in this trade. Washington remained the hub for the Pamlico-Tar River region. Steamboats carried passengers and cargo almost daily to and from Belhaven and other communities downstream and upriver to Greenville and Tarboro when there was adequate water in the Tar. Even after a spur of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad was completed from the main line at Parmele, steamer and barge traffic continued to be important. In fact the river craft complemented the railroad trade by linking the coastal region with the rail center at Washington.

The railroads also stimulated the town's shipbuilding industry. Steamboats continued to be constructed for the
river trade. In addition, the railroads contracted for a large number of transfer barges that were used to ferry cars from one side of a stream to the other where bridges did not exist. In 1891 Myers agreed to build a 125-foot "car" barge for the Norfolk & Southern Railroad to be used on the Chowan River between Edenton and Mackeys Ferry. In 1894 he contracted with the same line for a second large barge. During the following year one was laid down under an agreement with the Atlantic and Danville Railroad. In 1894 Farrow contracted with Norfolk & Southern for three large barges and the following year built eight more. Also in 1898 Chauncey and Liddon (a new firm) built one for the Norfolk & Southern.40

Barges were used increasingly in the canal and river traffic. In 1872 the Norfolk Journal predicted the eclipse of the small sailing vessels engaged in the coastal trade by barges. An undetermined number of barges were built during the latter years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries for local and distant interests. A local newspaper noted that Washington shipyards "build a better and cheaper barge than . . . can be built in the North and (are) . . . constantly getting orders to build."41

The established firms of Myers and Farrow continued to be the principal builders during these years. Farrow rebuilt and enlarged his yard in 1884 only to have it destroyed by fire in 1890. Although Farrow constructed barges, steamboats, and tugs, he apparently built more

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40Washington Gazette, January 18, April 12, October 25, 1894; March 26, 1896; Edenton Fisherman & Farmer, February 23, 1894; Washington Progress, July 9, February 12, October 24, 1895; January 14, 1896; September 28, 1898; News and Observer (Raleigh), December 17, 1899, hereinafter cited as News and Observer.

41Washington Gazette, March 26, 1896; see also Washington Progress, May 18, 1899; October 22, November 11, 1890; March 22, 1900; Merchant Vessels of the United States, 1896 and 1910.
sailing vessels, both fishing and trading, than any of the other builders. Between 1888 and 1892 six schooners were laid down at his yard. In 1901 Farrow and Chauncey became partners and when Farrow died in 1906, Chauncey became sole proprietor of the facility.

Myers' Sons Shipyard was owned and operated by T.H.B. Myers, who also owned and operated steamboats and acted as the agent for the Old Dominion Steamship Company. His yard was the largest and most prosperous in the town, employing forty workers in 1894. Undoubtedly his connection with Old Dominion helped him in securing railroad contracts. As the Washington Progress noted, "the majority of the work done is for the various railroads and steamboat lines."

Daniel S. Liddon, an experienced shipwright, joined with Myers for a brief period in the 1890s but a disagreement over the division of profits terminated the partnership. Liddon later worked with Chauncey and built several vessels at other localities. Myers continued building vessels until he died, like his competitor, Farrow, in 1906. During the last years his yard specialized in building towboats.

In 1892 the Army Corps of Engineers established a depot on Castle Island for the construction and repair of vessels. During its three years existence (it was moved to New Bern in 1895), several vessels were built at the facility including the 72-foot side wheel steamer "General Thom" and the section dredge "Albemarle." The army considered it more economical to hire local carpenters to build the vessels than to contract with the local yards.

In 1889 the Washington Gazette listed three shipyards in the city, Myers', Farrow's, and one belonging to A.W. Styron. Styron was not a shipbuilder by profession, but a businessman according to the 1870 census. During his active career, he engaged in a number of enterprises from selling stock for a hotel on Ocracoke to owning and operating a lime kiln on Castle Island. In general, however, he specialized in the shipping business. He was the type of local entrepreneur who constantly sought new business ventures, some of which were successful, but many of which failed. One local newspaper characterized him as a "genius... who revolutionized the shipping traffic on Tar river and to Northern cities"; and another paper said that Styron started out "with a blind mule and ten gallons of honey and built the steamer "Edgecombe." A Washington lawyer who had frequent dealings with Styron and his creditors wrote in 1895 that Styron "is a great brag, and expects to do many things which are purely visionary." He added, "Styron himself utterly incoherent [sic] and there is no hope of getting anything of him." He founded several steamboat companies and built a number of vessels for them. His first steamboat, the "Edgecombe" was built in 1877, followed by the "Greenville," two years later, and the "Tarboro" in 1880. In 1833 he launched the "Margie," and in 1889 according to a local paper, he was building a 400-ton vessel — the largest steamer ever built in North...
In 1905, Styron acting for a recently formed firm, The Virginia and Carolina Transportation Company, laid down a new steamboat. The company became insolvent and was unable to complete the vessel. In a court suit instituted by a lumber mill against the defunct company, one witness mentioned, “there is no market in the town of Washington for the sale of steamboats.”

The prosperity of the eighties and early nineties gave way to a slump. The depression that swept the country in the mid-nineties affected Washington. The president of the one local yard wrote in 1895: “Like all sections of the country we are having a very dull season. . . . Since the early spring there has not been a craft built here; the only work in this line has been repairing old work.” In 1899 the steamer Alma, which ran from Washington up river, was withdrawn from service “for want of sufficient patronage.” The last steamboats completed in the city, the Ohio and the Goldsboro, were launched in 1901. Between 1901 and 1917 only five small gasoline freight and towboats, one yacht, and one floating theatre were built in the port.

In spite of the decline in vessel construction, the repair and hauling business continued to be lucrative. Primarily for this reason small yards and marine railways existed well into the twentieth century. The firm most noted for shipbuilding was Chauncey’s which apparently existed until the 1930s. The yard built the Jane Adams Floating Theatre in 1913. In 1925 Edna Ferber spent several days aboard this vessel gathering information and atmosphere for her famous novel Showboat. The theatre’s hull was 128 feet long, 32 feet wide, with an auditorium that seated up to 600 “downstairs,” and 250 in the gallery.

Shipbuilding is directly related to the shipping industry. In Washington the West Indies trade which had employed many of the schooners throughout the nineteenth century disappeared early in the twentieth century. By 1910 local papers ceased to mention this trade. It is difficult to determine why the trade ended. More than likely with the completion of the railroad to Norfolk it became more feasible economically to ship lumber (the primary export to the West Indies) to Nor-


folk and by freighter to the islands. Based on tonnage figures the coastwise trade (including canal) continued to be important, but because of cheaper freight rates, it was generally more economical to ship by railroad.\textsuperscript{52}

The railroad was the major reason for the collapse of the shipbuilding industry in the city. The completion of the Norfolk & Southern railroad from the Virginia port to Washington in 1907 was a major blow to waterborne transportation. In 1914 the Washington Daily News wrote that “since the town has two railway lines running in and out, steamboats are practically unknown except for a few tug boats owned by local mills.”\textsuperscript{53}

The development of automotive transportation added the final touch to the collapse of the industry. By 1910 there were approximately 2,400 motor vehicles traveling on some 48,000 miles of roads (mostly unimproved) in the state. During the 1920s the state inaugurated a highway improvement program, and by 1935 there were nearly a half million registered vehicles using the roads.

Inland water transportation declined rapidly in the state, including the Tar-Pamlico area. Until the outbreak of World War II riverboats carrying fertilizer occasionally ascended the Tar-Pamlico, but none of these vessels were built in Washington. In fact the only shipbuilding of note carried on in the port since early in the century occurred during World War II.

In 1943 the Elizabeth City Shipyard received a contract to build thirty wooden barges for the Army Corps of Engineers. Because Elizabeth City was “a restricted area as to labor,” the company leased land on the Pamlico River just below Washington’s city limits and formed the Pamlico Shipyard. When the barges were completed the yard built a number of shrimpng trawlers for General Seafoods. The yard was abandoned in 1945 when additional contracts could not be obtained.\textsuperscript{54}

The history of the shipbuilding industry in Washington typified small communities that initially depended upon water transportation. The industry was prosperous so long as this means of transportation was the principal one. With the development of a more efficient and cheaper means of transportation, the railroad, the industry collapsed. The industry was also successful in Washington because of an adequate supply of lumber and cheap labor. The port attracted outside buyers primarily because vessels could be built there cheaper than in the larger northern construction centers.

Washington benefited from the shelters afforded the industry by regulation and protection. In the colonial period British navigation laws afforded the protection. After the creation of the nation, the United States until recent years has required the use of American-built ships in its merchant marine. The result has been to protect the nation’s shipbuilding industry from foreign competition. This was particularly true in the coastwise trade where foreign vessels were excluded by means of heavy dues in 1789, and outright prohibition in 1817.\textsuperscript{55}

The shipbuilding industry in Washington was never

\textsuperscript{52}The News and Observer in a special Washington edition, November 17, 1907, reported that the Dismal Swamp and the Chesapeake & Albemarle canals charged a 10 percent toll based on the current freight rates. For tonnage figures see United States Register of the Treasury, United States Bureau of the Census, Foreign Commerce and Navigation of the United States; and for domestic see the enrollment papers for various years in RG41.

\textsuperscript{53}Washington Daily News, August 11, 1914. See also “Steamboating on the Tar,” The State, XI (February 5, 1944), 1, 21-22.

\textsuperscript{54}For the Pamlico Shipyard, see records of the Elizabeth City Shipyard in the hands of the former president of the company, Ernest J. Sanders, Elizabeth City, North Carolina. See also W.H. Gahagan, Inc., and Gahagan Construction Corporation file, Files of the War Contracts Price Adjustment Board, Records of the Secretary of War, National Archives Record Group 107; taped interview conducted with Ernest J. Sanders, March 16, 1977, typed copy in possession of the writer; and Pamlico Shipyard, Inc., to Chief of Naval Operations, May 24, 1945, Pamlico Shipyard File in QM File, Records of the Bureau of Ships, National Archives Record Group 19.

\textsuperscript{55}Hutchins, American Maritime Industries, 42.
large in the sense that it was the dominant economic interest of the community. Nevertheless, it was an important industry and played a major role in the economic history of the town from the colonial period until the twentieth century. The absence of adequate records makes it impossible to determine the exact number of vessels built in Washington. Nevertheless, it seems clear that large numbers were constructed. How did Washington compare with the other ports in the state? Again, there is not adequate documentation to make an acceptable comparison, but what information is available suggests that Washington, along with Wilmington, New Bern, Elizabeth City, and Beaufort-Morehead City, were the state's most important centers of shipbuilding.⁵⁶ Like many communities in the country the shipbuilding industry was directly related to local transportation needs. So long as Washington and the surrounding area was dependent upon waterborne transportation shipbuilding flourished, but when railroads and roads replaced the waterways, the industry collapsed.

⁵⁶This is based on an examination of registers and enrollment papers in RG41.

In the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century historians of the Reconstruction era oftentimes dealt harshly with the Freedmen's Bureau generally and with its agents in particular. In topical histories, state studies, and local accounts these agents have been pictured as radical extremists who attempted to remold post-Civil War society by utilizing the freedmen of the South for their own nefarious purposes. They have been accused of arousing the political passions of blacks and of urging them to become active in Republican party politics. At a time when planters were desperately in need of laborers it was charged that agents dispensed free rations and allowed blacks to live in promiscuous idleness without working. In cases that involved litigation Freedmen's Bureau agents were accused of always siding with blacks and ruling against whites regardless of the evidence. These public servants were depicted as corrupt and unethical in all of their activities, and above all they were alleged to be incompetent and