

No. 7

HOUSEBOAT HUNTING LODGE - BUILT 1927

BUFFALO CITY - MILLTAIL CREEK - DARE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Captain Will Colonna's floating hunting camp being towed into the entrance of Milltail Creek a branch off the Alligator River not far from East Lake, West of Mann's Harbor in Dare County, North Carolina heading for a winter's hunting season to be tied to a pier at a once existing town called Buffalo City, then having a population of 1000 people who worked at the saw mill and lived in houses near by.

Captain Will Colonna was the owner of the houseboat and President of Colonna's Shipyard in Norfolk, Virginia. He built the houseboat using a Chesapeake & Ohio wooden carfloat pontoon as the hull and building the two story house on it of his own design. Each fall he would tow it to Buffalo City where it remained until hunting season was over then returning it to Norfolk. It was used by shipyard customers, business associates, friends and of course for his own pleasure hunting deer, bear, squirrel, etc. mostly from row boats and canoes.

The houseboat is being towed by the steam tug Carl D. Colonna - built 1891 with hunting enthusiasts and members of its crew on board. Along with its sea sled and row boats with outboard motors being towed along behind, canoes, oil drums, gas cans, etc. on the platform, smoke coming from the cook stove and as always the American flag flying made quite a sight back in the late 1920's and early 1930's in this vast swamp land wilderness.

There were many stories of this houseboat and of Buffalo City - here are but a few I remember my father telling me.

There were so many corn liquor stills you could throw a rock from one to another.

The first time or two the house boat was seen in that country in those days painted white with men and guns aboard flying the American flag, the bootleggers were frightened; they thought they were federal agents coming to bust up the whisky stills. But as time went on, I understand the hunters and bootleggers became good friends.

Each morning at daybreak another gallon of corn whisky had been placed on the deck of the houseboat. When asked who put it there, the men always said it was an old lady from the village dressed in shaggy clothes called the Seahag.

While the houseboat was moored at Buffalo City each hunting season, it was necessary to commute from Norfolk by automobile, ferry boats and many miles of unpaved roads. Whenever someone arrived, they were not usually greeted with hello, glad to see you but more often with you made it, when did you leave to get here, come on in I know you're tired.

As a young boy no more than six years old, I stayed on this houseboat at Buffalo City, I don't know exactly how old I was or how many times I stayed there but I can say that I have the most vivid memories of being aboard the houseboat with my father, his hunting friends, the colored cook Jonesie and I remember well the boats they used for hunting, the large timber pier the houseboat was moored to, the hunting dogs and most vividly of all the excitement upon their return from a day's hunting and the showing of the deer they had killed.

Right many years ago I visited the Buffalo City site, Mann's Harbor, East Lake area several times and I don't think I met one older person who didn't remember the houseboat and most of the younger people had heard about it. But I know without some record of this houseboat and its people in this swamp wilderness, its existence will have soon vanished so this paper with a bit of its history and a recreation in the painting through much research of a few old photos, the locating of Mr. Thomas Midgette who remembers the houseboat well as a boy on tugboats with his father, information from my sisters and things I remember along with the artist's Mr. Casey Holtzinger, ingenious abilities and imagination, I hope to preserve at least a little longer a bit of very colorful history and a great sense of pride to me and my family that may otherwise be lost.

Bill Colonna

W. W. Colonna, Jr. - Age 57
September, 1986