

# Soundside Learning

## This Week On The Sound



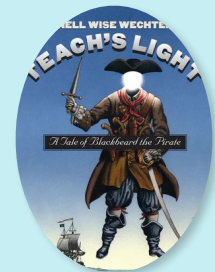
**The Mailboat Aleta**  
Photo: CSWM&HC Collection

## Christmas By Boat...

### Core Sound Christmas Traditions

Christmas is a time that evokes many wonderful memories for all of us. Depending upon one's generation Christmas might conjure up days of anxiously anticipating the arrival of the seasonal Sears and Roebuck catalog, visiting the local Five and Dime, and yes; for those youngsters out there, "Cyber Monday". However, for generations of early Core Sound families, Christmas came not via a sleigh driven by "eight tiny reindeer" but via the mailboat and its captain.

Before the coming of paved roads and bridges to the Down East communities, each hamlet was essentially its own "island", many of them literally. For these Core Sounders, contact with the outside world and access to many essential goods was dependent upon the periodic arrival of the mailboat. The names of the various mailboats became synonymous with the communities it served; The *Aleta* at Portsmouth and Ocracoke, or The *Pet* at Harkers Island brought what little these humble fishing families could afford for their children during the holiday season. Oftentimes wives would be forced to wait for their husbands to report back a large catch of fish before placing the Christmas order so that it might be paid for.



Sound Reading  
Material For You &  
Your Child

**Teach's Light**  
By: Nell Wechter

*The legend of Teach's Light has been handed down by the people of Stumpy Point village in coastal North Carolina for nearly three centuries. None can say when the mysterious light that hovers above Little Dismal Swamp will next appear, but it is said to guard a store of treasure buried long ago by Edward Teach (c. 1680-1718), better known as the infamous pirate Blackbeard.*

### Did You Know?

*The most famous and daring act in the career of Blackbeard came in 1718 when Blackbeard blockaded the port of Charleston, SC. Blackbeard blockaded the port in order to seize, not money or gold, but medicine to cure an illness he was suffering from.*

# The Channel Net

## A Harkers Island Innovation

It could be said that there is no better example of both a literal, as well as figurative, example of a “sea change” for the residents living along the shores of Core Sound than the Outer Banks Hurricane of 1933. Better known locally as the “Storm of ’33”, it is estimated that the cyclone peaked at an intensity of a category 4, eventually making landfall near Cape Hatteras as a category 2.

As the storm moved over the Outer Banks, a new inlet was opened just northwest of Cape Lookout, separating Shackleford and Core Banks and allowing for greatly increased tidal flow in the Back Sound and Core Sound areas around Harkers Island. The opening of this inlet and the eventual deepening of it fundamentally changed the mindset of the fishermen in the nearby communities. Now, Core Sound fishermen and especially those of Harkers Island had direct access to the Atlantic Ocean other than through the more distant and more turbulent Beaufort Inlet. This change would, in time, bring about new markets, bigger catches, and larger vessels better equipped to handle the waters of the open ocean. One Harkers Island resident, reflecting on the opening of the inlet some years later said, “The tide went out, and the future came in.”

Shortly after the opening of the new inlet, later to be known as Barden Inlet, Harkers Island fishermen began to take notice of a new seasonal migration of shrimp as they moved out of coastal estuaries, along the shores of Harkers Island and Straits, and out of Barden Inlet as they made their way into ocean waters.

This phenomenon of tide and shrimp lead the enterprising fishermen of Harkers Island to begin development of what would become one of the island’s most famous “exports,” the Channel Net.

A Channel Net is similar in design to a typical shrimp trawl, in that it is shaped essentially like a funnel with two “wings” that eventually taper back into the cod end of the net known as the “tail-bag” where the shrimp are collected and eventually dumped. While a trawl relies on otter doors or “trawl doors” and the power of the vessel to spread and hold the trawl open, the Channel Net is a different animal.

Relying entirely upon the uniquely strong tides of Core Sound, generated by the tandem inlets of Barden and Beaufort flanking Shackleford Banks from the east and west, respectively, there is something almost mystical about watching a channel net “stand up”. The nets are set, as their name suggests, along the edge of channels that run along to the shore where the roaring ebb tides carry schools of shrimp. Fishermen will anchor their vessel at the location of the “set” prior to the tidal change when flood tide slacks and ebb tide slowly begins to make.

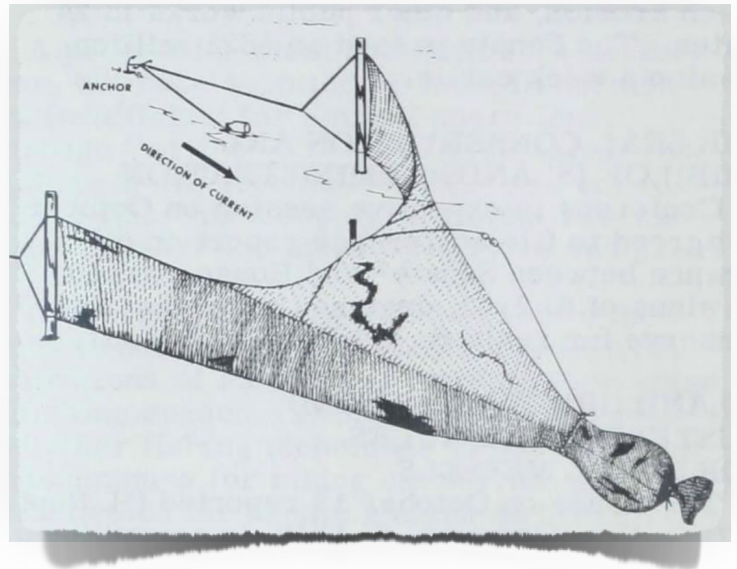
Any experienced channel-netter knows the perfect time to set; when there is just enough ebb tide to make the staffs of the net stand vertical in the water, held in place by two large anchors bridled to the two end staffs. Once the net is set, almost on command the tidal force will lift the staffs upright, opening the net and allowing shrimp to enter as the night’s ebb tide. The fisherman will then anchor its vessel over the net’s tail-bag where they will periodically hoist and dump the contents after which the tail-bag is retied, and returned to the water to fill up again. This process of “fishing” the net will be continued all night or until the ebb tide diminishes to a point where the net’s iconic staffs will no longer stand upright at which time the net will be “taken up”.

During the summer and fall seasons, you can still witness the nightly migration of Harkers Island’s channel netters as they make their way to famous locations only a true Core Sounder could rattle off on demand; The Locust Tree, Tongue Shoal, The Bridge, The Goldmine, The 44, The Front Set, or Abe's Lump. These are the fabled “Channel Net Sets” where it is rumored that some fishermen spend the majority of their lives, fishing their channel nets.

### Sources:

\* NC State Archives

\* CSWM&HC “Living On The Edge” Exhibit



*Diagram of A Channel-Net.  
Photo: U.S. Department of Interior*

**The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center is proud to announce our first-ever Channel-Net Christmas Display! This display is complete with a Harkers Island-built boat, and channe**  **display.**