

A Treasure Trove in a Small Town: How Beaufort, NC is Flourishing

After Finding Artifacts from Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge*

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A Live Look at History: An eight-foot cannon was salvaged from the wreck of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* at the Beaufort Inlet in October 2011// Courtesy of: NC DNCR

Booty in Beaufort:

Beaufort, North Carolina is not your typical run-of-the-mill coastal town. The secret to the extraordinary nature of this small town nestled on the Beaufort Inlet exists underneath its waters, scattered on a seabed, and awaiting further exploration by Beaufort's community. The 300-year-old shipwreck of Blackbeard's renowned flagship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*, was located near the Beaufort Inlet in 1996, transforming the course of Beaufort's history to this day. Locals will attest that this discovery has been a profound boost to Beaufort's exposure in the research world, and has attracted visitors from all over to be transported back to the time when Blackbeard and his crew ruled the seas.

A Pirate's Life For Me:

Blackbeard, aka Edward Thache (pronounced Teach and spelled a variety of ways), was arguably the most famous pirate to roam the Atlantic Coast. During the “Golden Age of Piracy,” Blackbeard and other pirates alike dotted the oceans around the Caribbean and the eastern coast of North America, in order to take prizes and add to their fleets.

This pirate’s early life is hazy, with few documents to give historians a clear idea of his origins. Conflicting accounts state that Blackbeard was born in either Philadelphia, Bristol, or London in 1680. According to the North Carolina Maritime Museum, in 2002, North Carolina genealogists found that Bath, NC resident James Beard had a son named Edward who could have been the pirate; however, no evidence seems to support this. Nevertheless, some sources suggest that Blackbeard’s home base was in North Carolina, which wouldn’t make the Bath theory a very far throw. During his young adult years, Blackbeard is said to have been a [privateer](#) in the [Queen Anne’s War](#) (1701-1714) and started his journey as a pirate not long after. Blackbeard was taken under the wing of captain Benjamin Hornigold before becoming a captain of his own ship, and later a master of the seas.

Blackbeard’s legacy entails a story of his alarming appearance and dominating strategies that left other pirates shaking in their boots and continues to leave people stunned to this day. According to *Blackbeard’s Sunken Prize: The 300-Year Voyage of the Queen Anne’s Revenge*, Blackbeard got his nickname from his signature thick, black hair that covered the entirety of his face, that he would twist with ribbons and wrap around his ears. As if his beard wasn’t menacing enough, Blackbeard’s contemporary Nathaniel Mist further describes the pirate’s physicality by saying: “In time of action, he wore a sling over his shoulders with three brace of pistols hanging in holsters like bandoliers, and stuck lighted matches under his hanging in holsters like bandoliers, and stuck lighted matches under his hat, which appearing on each side of his face, his eyes naturally looking fierce and wild, made him altogether such a figure, that imagination cannot form an idea of a fury, from hell, to look more frightful.” Blackbeard surely scared off many of the pirates he came into contact with based on the way he looked, but also because of his strength and unwillingness to back down. He preferred to stand his ground and always prepared his fleet for any approaching naval force.

Conquer and Advance:

According to the NC Maritime Museum, Blackbeard is believed to have captured a total of 70 vessels throughout his lifetime. His most memorable captures were in late 1717 to early 1718. Before this period, Blackbeard commanded a small sloop in late 1716, enjoying a bonus of 90 men and 8 guns. In the summer of 1717, he joined forces with pirate captain Stede Bonnet, and later on ended up assuming command of his ship *Revenge*. By the end of 1717, Blackbeard had taken command of the French slave ship *La Concorde*, Stede Bonnet’s ship *Revenge*, and later David Herriot’s sloop *Adventure* and a small Spanish sloop. This group of four vessels alone employed over 300 pirates. The French slave ship *La Concorde*, which Blackbeard captured off the French trading port Martinique, would later become his most prized possession. After capturing the ship from a sick and crippled crew, Blackbeard adopted *La Concorde* as his flagship. According to *Blackbeard’s Sunken Prize*, Blackbeard renamed the ship *Queen Anne’s Revenge*, in what was “likely intended as a snub to the English queen’s successor King George I.” Now, Blackbeard was ready to take on the rough seas with his shiny, new flagship that would be talked about for hundreds of years to come.

Shark Bait: The Sinking of the Queen Anne’s Revenge:

After a 6-month run in the aqua waters of the Caribbean, the *Queen Anne's Revenge* sailed up the Atlantic Coast before entering the waters around Beaufort, where the ship would ultimately meet its demise. At this point, Blackbeard was on a mission to evade the governmental authorities at the port of New Providence in the Bahamas and their freshly appointed governor who was out to enforce the king's pardon to pirates willing to quit the business. Since Blackbeard was at this port to refuel and perform maintenance work, he didn't want to get singled out as one of the pirates who was continuing to do the dirty work. Blackbeard then ventured north from Charlestown and faced the tricky waters of the Carolinas. According to *Blackbeard's Sunken Prize*, the geography of the Outer Banks of North Carolina proved to be limiting to sailing and commerce in the area. In fact, in the years before Blackbeard arrived, the British Board of Trade issued a statement saying the coast was: "...barr'd by a vast chain of sand banks so very shallow and shifting that sloops drawing only five foot of water run great risk of crossing them." Thus, the name "Outer Banks" instantly warded off pirates, as it was a sign of shallow waters and a burying ground for wrecked ships.

So, why did Blackbeard want to risk it all to end up in Beaufort? As *Blackbeard's Sunken Prize* theorizes, it was because the pirate believed that it would be a suitable base for his operations. Blackbeard most likely thought of this idea because he knew that Beaufort bestowed a deep, natural harbor. This harbor would make it easier for Blackbeard to dock the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Also, Blackbeard must have wanted to take advantage of the shipping lanes off of Beaufort's shore, where he knew he could target other ships. Overall, Beaufort's unique geographical features made it a place that the captain couldn't pass up.

In order to successfully dock the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, Blackbeard had to maneuver through Beaufort Inlet that ran between the islands of Shackleford and Bogue. *Queen Anne's Revenge* was already at a disadvantage, because it was a square-rigged vessel trying to squeeze its way through a narrow channel. Ultimately, on that disastrous day in June of 1718, the *Queen Anne's Revenge* didn't live up to the test. In *Blackbeard's Sunken Prize*, pirate David Harriot, who was then serving under Blackbeard, describes the incident by saying: "Captain Thache may have believed he could bring his ship through the inlet, but he also must have recognized that *Queen Anne's Revenge* was handicapped by the extra armament on its deck, making it top-heavy, unstable, and difficult to handle, especially if the guns were being carried "run-out" in a battle-ready position." Perhaps this was only a series of miscalculations by Blackbeard that all lead up to what he dreaded the most as a pirate—a wrecked ship. However, it's clear that this plan was doomed from its conception. Taking into account the shallow waters of the North Carolina coast and the ship's awkward size and measurements, there was no way that the *Queen Anne's Revenge* could have completed this ambitious mission.

Hitting the Motherload: The Discovery of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* in Beaufort:

By the time Blackbeard's ship ran aground off the sandbar of Beaufort's Inlet in 1718, the town of Beaufort was only a small fishing village. The town of Beaufort was founded only five years prior to the wreck of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. At this point, Beaufort's commerce mainly consisted of small sloops (fore-and-aft rigged boats) trading with one another in various ports along the East Coast. That being said, Beaufort was in no position to deal with the recently wrecked *Queen Anne's Revenge*. The town barely had the money and resources to conduct an offshore salvage of the wreck. This effort would have required lots of expensive equipment and not to mention, intense manual labor. However, thanks to the help of advanced technology and an established treasure-salvage company, the *Queen Anne's Revenge* was finally open for business on the dawn of the 21st century.

Originally searching for eighteenth-century ships that had been wrecked near Beaufort Inlet, divers working for the treasure-salvage company Intersal came across cannons, an anchor, and other items in close proximity to the area of examination in the fall of 1996. Upon further exploration, the divers swam up to another cluster of cannons, which made it more likely that this was the site of Blackbeard's revered *Queen Anne's Revenge*. How do we know for sure that Intersal hit the motherload? The NC Maritime Museum states that the artifacts that were found, including a 1705 bell and a 1713 cannon, place the wreck site in the exact period of Blackbeard's known operations. Additionally, records confirm that the dimensions of the ship were compatible with that of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

Treasure Trove: The Recovery of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*:

The first successful session of the 1997 investigation of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* involved divers and various research vessels such as the *Snap Dragon II*, UNC-Wilmington's R/V *Sea Hawk*, and of course the Intersal's vessel *Pelican III*. According to *Blackbeard's Sunken Prize*, the recovery team was able to spot a pile of cannons, anchors, and multiple unidentifiable concretions sticking up through the seabed. The team then used a 3-ft.-by-6-ft. excavation unit they called Test Unit 1 to recover artifacts at the southern end of the site. They were able to dig up a total of 284 objects, including "ceramics, glass, wood and bone fragments, and two pewter dishes, along with numerous lead shot and a large quantity of ballast stones and concretions, as well as Cannon C-2."

Even before this 1997 excavation, divers from Intersal were able to find a special bell-shaped artifact on the day the *Queen Anne's Revenge* was discovered. According to the QAR Project's [website](#), the bell dates back to 1705 and is thought to have been obtained when Blackbeard got a hold of a Spanish sloop off the coast of Cuba. The bell is inscribed with the letters "IHS MARIA," which alludes to the Holy Name of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. According to *Blackbeard's Sunken Prize*, "IHS MARIA" was a typical Catholic inscription found on bells from seventeenth and eighteenth-century Spain and France. The bell was an important find, because it was one of the first indications that this was an eighteenth-century shipwreck. It is believed that this bell was used in the ship's [forecastle](#) when Blackbeard wanted to signal and sound alarms.



Sound the Bells: Various artifacts such as this 1705 bell and different-sized cannons were recovered from the *Queen Anne's Revenge* shipwreck // Courtesy of: qaronline.org

There is no doubt that the people of Beaufort were antsy to get these recovery efforts underway. According to *Blackbeard's Sunken Prize*, “No one with the QAR Shipwreck Project, including us, anticipated the extreme excitement from the public at the discovery of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. While the media attention and public scrutiny were a bit much at times, they pushed us to provide detailed research, site recovery, and artifact conservation procedures prior to expeditions to the QAR site.” The Beaufort people were eager to solve the mysteries of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* as soon as the ship was discovered. As the QAR professionals were busy taking apart this maritime relic, all eyes were on Beaufort and what they would soon uncover about the past.

Current Queen Anne's Revenge Efforts:

Across Beaufort and other areas of North Carolina, efforts are currently being made to obtain, preserve, examine, and display the artifacts that have been scavenged from the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. One of the largest *Queen Anne's Revenge* efforts is the called the Queen Anne's Revenge (QAR) Project. According to the project's [website](#), the QAR Project is an organized undertaking designed to “explore day by day the origins of Blackbeard, his famous flagship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*, and his misadventures along the Carolina coast.”

Operating under the Division of Archives and History's Office of State Archaeology, the QAR Project staff is composed of professionals who are clearly passionate about this discovery and the wealth of knowledge it brings about the pirate dealings of the past. These professionals include archaeologists, conservators, office managers, and lab directors. In addition to these individuals, there are various research and logistic partners like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and sponsors such as Grady-White and the Archaeological Institute of America. In all, there are many QAR professionals who work tirelessly to uncover Blackbeard's legacy, both literally and figuratively.

After artifacts are recovered from the *Queen Anne's Revenge* shipwreck, they are taken to the *Queen Anne's Revenge* Conservation Lab at ECU's West Research Campus in Greenville, NC. The lab is a joint venture between the university and the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) that was established in 2004. According to the QAR Project, researchers at the conservation lab work to identify, count, and add artifacts to the more than 250,000 QAR artifact assemblage. To help protect the integrity of the artifacts, researchers at the lab clean and desalinate the artifacts that may have become slightly corroded due to extended submersion in saltwater. The researchers then dry and examine the artifacts before sending them off to the official repository for the QAR collection, the NC Maritime Museum.

A QAR Vision in Beaufort:

After learning all there is to know about Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge*, I was eager to uncover the resounding impact it had on the Beaufort community. Who better to talk to and get a sense of the economic, social, and historical significance of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* findings than my aunt, Lynn Mauzé. Mauzé, a fairly new Beaufort resident and past elementary school teacher, is familiar with Blackbeard and his flagship that is practically sitting in her

backyard. Mauzé used to teach a whole unit about pirates to her fourth-grade students, a unit she claims was the “most popular, year after year.”

When discussing Blackbeard’s legacy, Mauzé thinks that the reason why Blackbeard has become a household name in North Carolina is because of the discovery of his beloved ship, the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*. “It’s an excellent example of how a question can lead to research,” she says. Mauzé mentions that thanks to the QAR Project team’s efforts, countless artifacts from the shipwreck have not only been discovered, but also analyzed, authenticated, and displayed.

Trying to get a sense of what the locals in Beaufort think about this discovery, I asked what this finding means to her and to the surrounding community. Mauzé then told me that “[The QAR discovery] has brought national and international recognition to a smaller market.” She goes on to explain that this recognition comes in the form of expansive research conducted by experts in the field, spreads in National Geographic, and even QAR material incorporated into North Carolina classrooms. It’s safe to say that this exposure has solely been due to the finding of the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* in Beaufort. Mauzé says that this top-of-the-line research would have been limited to metropolitan areas if the discovery of the ship never even happened. “The QAR has invited a broad range of historians and scientists to come to Beaufort for an unexpected purpose,” she explains. This sudden boom in activity has caused economic benefits to follow in the Beaufort area. Mauzé then tells me that the large influx of visitors to the NC Maritime Museum boosts business for local restaurants and shops. This is just another advantage that the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* brings to this coastal town, which is heavily reliant on tourism in the summer months. With more people flocking to Beaufort year-round, local businesses enjoy greater profits. “The discovery of the wreck of this well-known ship off Beaufort’s coast has led to better recognition by tourists, politicians and even locals of the rich history that this relatively small town holds,” as Christine Brin, a Program Coordinator for the NC Maritime Museum, sums up about the attention Beaufort received after this monumental discovery.

In all, Mauzé states that the people of Beaufort are glad to be a part of this history unravelling in front of their very eyes. “It has created an untapped sense of pride for our coastal town,” she proclaims.

Avast Ye! Youngins:

The NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort is not only the official repository for the QAR collection, but it is also the epicenter for locals and tourists to come to and learn about any and all things QAR. The museum is situated on one of downtown Beaufort’s charming main roads, Front Street, which overlooks the waterfront and further into the depths of where Blackbeard wrecked his ship in 1718. The building itself is a testament to nautical history, as the it is made out of worn, cedar shakes and is embellished with a picture of a sailing ship. Not to mention, there are multiple North Carolina flags that are billowing in the wind atop a ship’s mast in front of the building, making it seem like the museum is being steered out to sea.



Setting Sail: The North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort, NC proudly displays a glimpse into its rich nautical past//

Courtesy of: North Carolina Maritime Museums Beaufort

According to [Beaufort, NC's Crystal Coast Visitors Guide](#), exhibits at the museum range from the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, Beaufort's seafood industry, and even a new exhibit highlighting NC's rich surfing past. However, Blackbeard and his *Queen Anne's Revenge* dominate the museum. Brin states that: "...the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort offers a permanent exhibit featuring over 300 different artifacts recovered from the wreck site; a traveling exhibit of artifacts from the site that has been featured at multiple sites in North Carolina; and over 1,000 programs for the public in addition to over 100 programs for groups annually, many of which focus on Blackbeard or *Queen Anne's Revenge*."

Mauzé, now a frequent visitor to the NC Maritime Museum, was excited to point out that the museum was open year-round to the public "at no charge." "The specially designed rooms categorize and explain the [*Queen Anne's Revenge*] artifacts in displays for people of all ages. This encourages families, school groups (both local and traveling), and senior citizens to visit as often as possible. The museum has also offered a number of guest lectures (free as well) which local residents enjoy attending," Mauzé says concerning the plethora of resources that the museum offers.

There is no question that the NC Maritime Museum is a great attraction to people of all ages and is an opportunity for people to learn more about the maritime history of North Carolina right in the heart of downtown Beaufort. However, I noticed a trend as far as the age group that the museum is trying to target, that being children. I came to this realization after listening to my aunt telling me how she still takes notes at the museum to use when she chaperones field trip groups in Beaufort. It seems as though the NC Maritime Museum takes the time to design programming specifically for children, in hopes of educating them about Blackbeard and other maritime events that happened along the coast. I got a chance to hear about these specific efforts by talking to Brin, who says that her job description is very broad, ranging from designing children's programming, scheduling volunteers, going to schools for outreach programs, sitting in on planning committees, and fielding information requests about any number of maritime related topics. With her work, Brin not only reaches out to children in schools, but she tailors the information in the museum to plan programs for young kids. According to the [museum's website](#), one of these programs consists of a "Summer Science Program" that is in partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Reserve/National Estuarine Research Reserve. The programs goal is to "give students an opportunity to learn about the natural and maritime history of coastal

North Carolina through creative, hands-on experiences.” As a testament on the program’s website, Brin states that “These museum programs give students a chance to explore the maritime world and develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the maritime environment.” Children that take advantage of this program will be able to “...work together to learn how pirates like Blackbeard lived, dressed, ate and worked.” The NC Maritime Museum offers a hands-on approach to learning about pirates that these children otherwise might not receive in school.

Mauzé tells me that pirates can be a “forgotten” subject in elementary schools because it is not a tested subject. Still, she believes that young people should be informed about the rich pirate history that North Carolina has to offer. “We all learn different perspectives from our past, and hopefully, we learn the patterns of human behavior. We can only appreciate our current experiences when we know the struggles, challenges, defeats, victories, and heartaches of those who came before us,” she says.



Captiv(ated) By Pirates: My niece and nephew gaze up in amazement at a video board in the NC Maritime Museum// Courtesy of: Lynn Mauzé

When discussing Blackbeard’s appeal to her fourth-grade students during their pirate unit, Mauzé responded that usually students love a villain and that Blackbeard certainly captured their attention. Most notably, she says, the tantalizing legends of Blackbeard fascinated them to no end. Specifically, the story about how Blackbeard would light the candles on his beard to intimidate others. Brin mentioned the same tale about Blackbeard, noting the part where this show by Blackbeard “allowed the rumor to spread that he was the son of a devil.”

Another point of interest is Blackbeard’s death. Blackbeard was killed at Ocracoke Inlet in North Carolina in November of 1718, only a few short months after the sinking of the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*. According to the NC Maritime Museum, record has it that Blackbeard and his crew were attacked by the sloops *Jane* and *Ranger* sent by the Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood. This mission was carried out by Royal Navy Lieutenant Robert Maynard, who Blackbeard engaged in a violent fight with aboard one of the sloops. Maynard succeeded in killing Blackbeard, and Blackbeard’s head was removed and taken back to Virginia to prove that he was dead. What makes Blackbeard’s death so memorable, is the fact that Blackbeard’s head

was put on display on a pole near a harbor as a warning to those looking to become a pirate. From the gruesome and wild details of this story, it is no surprise that children and countless other people know Blackbeard from his hard-fought death.

Overall, the NC Maritime Museum is informing the people of Beaufort and beyond about this unforgettable pirate and his remarkable ship. Brin and the rest of the museum staff place an emphasis on teaching children about this piece of the past, in hopes that this story will be passed down for generations to come. The museum plays a vital role in preserving this history, and it certainly does justice to the Beaufort community and their role in uncovering the shipwreck of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*.

Taking a Stroll in Beaufort:

About a couple of years ago, my mom and I got the chance to visit my aunt after she recently moved into her new Beaufort home after a well-deserved retirement. I remember the fresh, coastal air filling my nostrils right as I stepped out of the car, and instantly feeling a certain serenity that one could only find at the beach. When it was time for dinner, the three of us ventured out to downtown Beaufort, which consists of a quaint waterfront lined with shops and restaurants, as well as dozens of historic homes. It was no surprise to see visitors from near and far, such as myself, coming to see what the town of Beaufort had to offer. Visitors are not only expecting to get a taste of Beaufort's charm, but they are also expecting to live out the scene that happened right off of Beaufort Inlet in June 1718 when Blackbeard left his greatest treasure to the people of this town. These people can do this simply by visiting the NC Maritime Museum and seeing the artifacts for themselves or taking a stroll along Beaufort's waterfront and looking out into the waters where Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge* still holds secrets of the past. A treasure that the people of Beaufort, like Christine Brin and my aunt, continue to explore, cherish, and share with others to make sure that this piece of their town's history is not forgotten as more and more time passes. The discovery of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* in Beaufort is essential for understanding the town's past and even more so the direction of Beaufort's future. For a ship that's spent three centuries underwater, the fascination of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* (and the actual ship) is not going anywhere, anytime soon.