

In 1783, the Treaty of Paris ended America's struggle for independence. In the years that followed, Swansboro began to emerge as a coastal port. Weeks' Wharf became one of the inspection points for the Port Beaufort customs district, which included Onslow County (Littleton 1983b:1; Brown 1960:349). In 1786, the coastal region consisting of Bogue, Bear and New River inlets was removed from the jurisdiction of Port Beaufort and new port and customs functions were established at the port of Swansboro. The value of trade entering the port, however, was never very large. Shipping records for the period 1 July 1789 to 10 March 1790 revealed that only 22 sloops and schooners entered the port (Watson 1995:55). Most of this trade was from South Carolina merchants. Exports included naval stores, wood products, tobacco, cotton and foodstuffs such as bacon, pork, chickens, corn, peas and other produce. Area merchants also found markets for natural resources like beeswax, snake root, deerskins and fish. Imports consisted of salt, molasses, rum, dry goods and foodstuff not produced locally. A post office was established in the new port in 1799.

The White Oak River's major industry was the exportation of naval stores: tar, pitch, turpentine and resin. Turpentine was mentioned in the county minutes as early as 1734. For more than 100 years after that date, turpentine and tar continued to be the chief source of revenue for the area. North Carolina placed first among the British colonies in production of this lucrative commodity and Onslow County ranked as high as fourth within the colony. Naval stores were packaged into barrels and kegs which were also locally manufactured. These products were exported from Swansboro and Deer Island beginning in the 1770s and continued to be a major export until the end of the 19th century. The barrels and kegs were rolled down the wharf into cargo nets. The nets were then gathered up and the cargo lifted aboard waiting schooners.

The period between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 saw an increase in Onslow's shipbuilding industry. In 1807, William Tatham, an agent of the national government sent to survey the coastline between the Chesapeake Bay and the Cape Fear River wrote, "The town of Swansborough seems to be chiefly employed on shipbuilding for the West India and coasting trade." He also reported about New River, "but though there has been a ship built here, and towed out to sea as light as she could be floated, yet difficulty of passing a shifting shallow bar... seldom admitting six feet of water... is a great prohibition" (Still 1983). The Coles and Price chart of 1806 shows Bogue Inlet with an 8-foot channel. It also shows the White Oak River with Cedar Point at the confluence of Bogue Sound, as well as Swansborough containing 11 structures.

The beginnings of Swansboro's shipbuilding industry may go back as far as 1787. In that year the *North Carolina Gazette* of New Bern carried this advertisement: "For sale and now ready to launched at Bogue [apparently the old names for Swansboro did not fall out of use for some time] a new vessel, built of live oak and cedar, of the following dimensions--48 or 49 feet keel, 19 feet beam, 7 feet 10 inches hold with double ends ... for terms apply to Titus Ogden." By 1812, at least 23 ocean going vessels had been built in Onslow County. Two-thirds of these ships, including all of the large ones, were built in Swansboro (Still 1983).

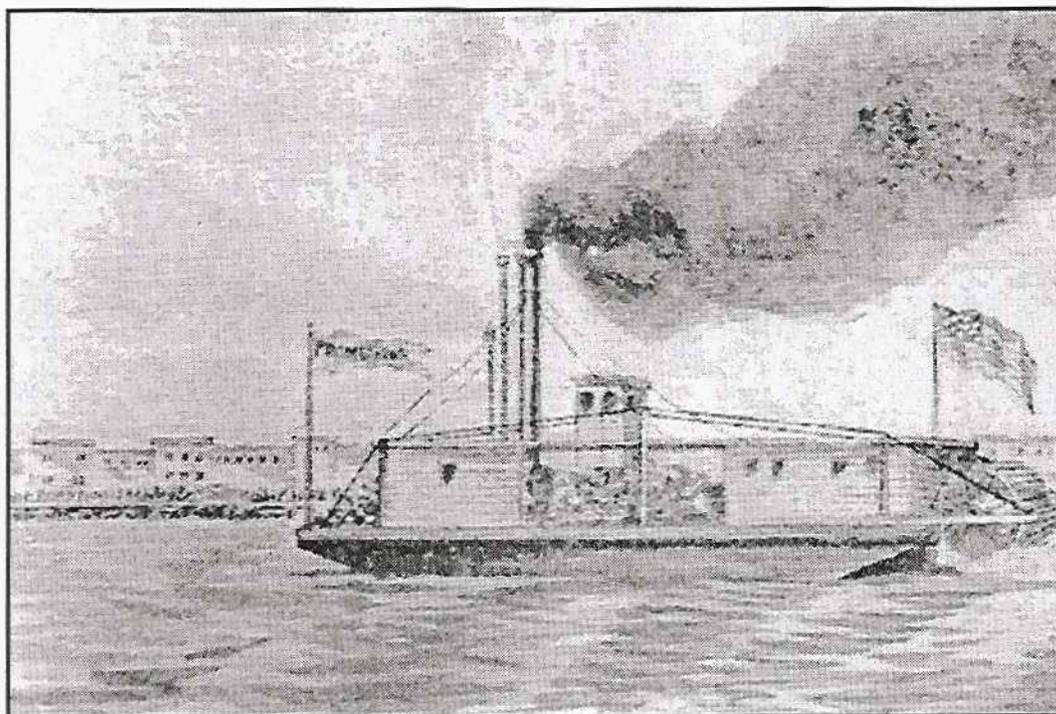


Figure 3. Illustration of the Swansboro built steamer *Prometheus* (Watson 1995:51).

During the War of 1812, the British Navy imposed another blockade of the American coast. This blockade inevitably led to a slowdown in trade and ship construction. American privateers countered the British move by harassing British merchant trade. A Swansboro native, Otway Burns, became North Carolina's most famous privateersman during the conflict. When war was declared, he sailed to New York and purchased a fast vessel named the *Zephyr* for \$8,000. The 147-ton vessel, renamed the *Snapdragon*, was armed with five 12-pounders, fifty muskets and four blunderbusses. The *Snapdragon* cruised the South American coast, the West Indies, the Caribbean Sea and as far north as Greenland in search of British merchant vessels. Burns and his crew had great success, netting on one cruise an estimated \$2.5 million in British Prizes.

After the war, Burns began shipbuilding on the Swansboro waterfront. In 1818, he built the *Prometheus*, the first steamboat constructed in North Carolina (Figure 3). The following year he sold his shipyard to William P. Ferrand. Burns also served in the state legislature, and ended his career as lifeboat keeper at the Brant Shoals Lightship at Portsmouth, North Carolina (Barbour 1976; Brown 1960:43-45; Littleton 1983c:2; Sharpe 1954:972).

Between 1800 and 1861, William P. Ferrand, Charles H. Barnum, Cyrus B. Glover, and Robert Spence McLean were the town's chief exporters of naval stores. After 1840, Daniel L. Russell, Jr. became Onslow County's foremost cotton producer and exporter. Agricultural products became increasingly important in Swansboro's maritime trade after the War of 1812 and reached its