

Menhaden Chanteymen ^[1]

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by Kelly Kress, 2006

Additional research provided by Margaret Foote.

The Menhaden Chanteymen are a group of retired African American fishermen who previously worked off the coast near Beaufort. The group, during their working years, used singing to synchronize the pulling of their nets of menhaden, or shad ^[2]. A leader sang out the first line of the song alone, to be answered with another line sung in harmony by the rest of the crew. The songs derived from many sources, including hymns ^[3] and gospel ^[4] songs, blues ^[5], and barbershop quartet songs, and they were often improvised.

In 1988 folklorists ^[6] Michael and Deborah Luster, hired by the North Carolina Arts Council ^[7] to survey the folk culture of Carteret County ^[8], arranged a gathering of about a dozen retired coastal fishermen. Beaufort blues singer and guitarist Richard "Big Boy" Henry, who worked for a time as a menhaden fisherman, helped the Lusters organize the event. Although they had not sung together in more than 30 years, the men recollected their songs almost effortlessly when they began to pantomime the action of working the net.

That year the ex-fishermen performed at a public event sponsored by the North Carolina Maritime Museum ^[9] in Beaufort. Since then the group, officially named the Menhaden Chanteymen, has performed for the North Carolina General Assembly ^[10] and the National Council on the Arts. They have also appeared at New York City's Carnegie Hall and on national television and radio. In 1990 the Menhaden Chanteymen recorded a collection of maritime work songs ^[11], *Won't You Help Me to Raise 'Em: Authentic Net Hauling Songs from an African-American Fishery* ^[12], for Global Village Music.

Additional Resources:

"Menhaden Fishing: Raising the Story of Menhaden Fishing." The North Carolina Visitor Center. http://www.ncvisitorcenter.com/Menhaden_Fishing.html ^[13] (accessed July 16, 2012).

Image Credits:

The Menhaden Chanteymen. YouTube.com video, 2:25, posted by bobngarner, March 6, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geAJI6he75I> ^[14].

Subjects:

Art ^[15]

Black and African American People ^[16]

Music ^[17]

Performing arts ^[18]

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Origin - location:

Beaufort County ^[21]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. ^[22]

1 January 2006 | Foote, Margaret; Kress, Kelly

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/menhaden-chanteymen> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/american-shad-nc-wins> [3] <https://ncpedia.org/hymnody> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/gospel-music> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/blues> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/folklore> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/north-carolina-arts-council> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/carteret> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/north-carolina-maritime-museum> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/work-songs> [12] <https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/24082032> [13] http://www.ncvisitorcenter.com/Menhaden_Fishing.html [14] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geAJI6he75I> [15] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/art> [16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/african-americans> [17] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/music> [18] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/performing-arts> [19] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/foote-margaret> [20] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/kress-kelly> [21] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-22> [22] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->