



# BEWARE THE BLOONNEERS!

*by Julie Thompson Adolf*

*As you stroll along the beaches of South Carolina or tour the marshes of the Lowcountry, you may wish to invest in a metal detector. Here, during the early 1700s, some of the past's most infamous criminals hid vast riches for safekeeping.*

*However, in many cases, the owners never returned to claim their treasures.*

*Instead, they often met unforeseen delays caused by a hangman's noose at White Point in Charles Town, (today known as Charleston).*

*This was the era when pirates terrorized the South Carolina coast.*



# RAISING THE BLOODY FLAG

During the 1700s, pirates flourished, particularly in Charles Town. Many colonial merchants, discontent with paying the King of England taxes for goods, illegally traded with pirates in hopes of enhancing profits. Governments and merchants did not object to piracy until it began to cost them money. When pirates captured ships carrying commercial cargo belonging to wealthy men, a sudden outcry arose to end the pirate trade. While once considered a profitable partnership, pirates soon became public enemies throughout Charles Town.

Pirates that terrorized South Carolina's coast comprised a variety of personalities and backgrounds. "Gentleman pirate" **Stede Bonnet** left his comfortable, respectable life as a sugar plantation owner in Barbados to seek adventure on the sea. Legend says that Bonnet's nagging wife actually drove him to leave Barbados for the relative peace of piracy. Bonnet's inexperience as a pirate was evident—he actually purchased his ship, the *Revenge*, rather than capturing it, and he paid his crew wages from his own pocket instead of providing a share of the booty.

Bonnet joined with one of the world's most notorious pirates—**Edward Teach**, better known as **Blackbeard**. Renowned for his fearsome appearance and erratic behavior, Blackbeard instilled terror and commanded respect throughout the Atlantic. Blackbeard and his men held the city of Charles Town ransom—they took numerous hostages from vessels entering and leaving the harbor, agreeing to free the hostages only if they received much-needed medical supplies. The governor met Blackbeard's demands.

Bonnet's alliance with Blackbeard proved a mistake. Sensing his inexperience, Blackbeard soon made Bonnet a prisoner aboard Blackbeard's ship, the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Though Bonnet eventually regained control of his ship, he was captured by Colonel William Rhett and sentenced to death on the gallows. Bonnet was hung for piracy at White Point on Dec. 10, 1718.

Blackbeard, however, continued to thrive along the South Carolina coast, plundering ships and terrorizing the Charles Town area. Blackbeard's luck eventually ran out, however, and he was killed in battle with the Royal Navy. His head was cut off and his skull displayed as a trophy.



Men weren't the only outlaws attacking vessels and sharing the booty. Women pirates also terrorized South Carolina. One of the most famous, **Anne Bonny**, proved to be just as bloodthirsty as her male counterparts. Bonny, a red-haired beauty with a fierce temper, is believed to be the daughter of a prosperous Charles Town planter. At 16, she ran away with a sailor, and they joined pirates in the Atlantic. Bonny encouraged fellow pirates to raid the Carolina coast, and she killed opponents in battle with a dagger. Eventually, Bonny fell for **Calico Jack Rackham**, a pirate known for his fancy calico attire. The two sailed and fought together until a British sloop captured them. Bonny blamed their capture on Calico Jack's poor fighting and cowardice. As he visited her the day of his execution, legend has it that she said, "I'm sorry to see this happen, but if you had fought like a man, you would not now be hanged like a dog!" Bonny, however, escaped the gallows due to her pregnancy—but after her capture, no one knows for certain what became of Anne Bonny. Some legends say she reconciled with her father and remained in Charles Town, others say that she returned to a life of piracy.

Piracy also influenced the names of several locales throughout South Carolina. **Drunken Jack Island** allegedly was named for a pirate who, weakened by too much rum, died on the island. **Murrells Inlet** supposedly was named for Captain John Murrell, who used the inlet as his headquarters while he preyed on ships at sea. Many areas throughout South Carolina felt the influence of piracy.

Although each pirate's legend is unique, the men and women who thrived during the "Golden Age of Piracy" shared several traits—they yearned for adventure, loved the seafaring life and craved the wealth that piracy provided. And, according to legend, they took advantage of the marshes and islands throughout South Carolina to hide their treasures for safekeeping until their return from the sea.

On your next visit to the coast, try your hand at treasure hunting. With time, ingenuity and some luck, you may uncover riches from the pirates' past.

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For more information on pirate tours, contact:

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