

MAPLE LEAF



A Great Escape

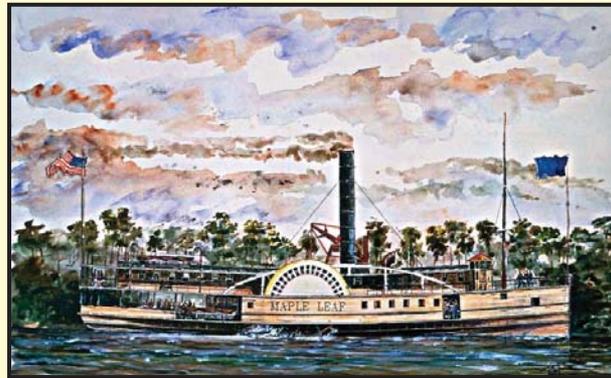


Currituck County played a vital role in a prisoner-of-war escape in 1863. At 1:30 P.M. on June 10, the troop-transport steamer *Maple Leaf* sailed from Fort Monroe, Va., for Fort Delaware, carrying 97 captured Confederate officers bound for the prisoner-of-war camp at Johnson’s Island in Ohio. Two hours later, the prisoners overpowered the twelve-man guard and took over the ship, then escaped in small boats south of Cape Henry. About thirty officers, most of them wounded, remained aboard and returned to Fort Monroe. The seventy escapees went ashore on the Currituck Banks in North Carolina, trekked south down the beach



Edmond McHorney, seated left, 1898
Courtesy Travis Morris

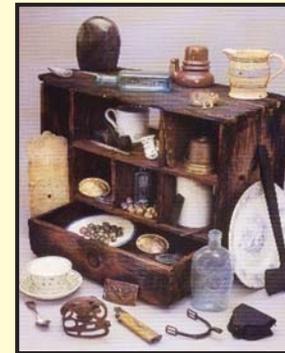
to a salt works, were ferried by Edmond McHorney and others across Currituck Sound, and camped south of the county courthouse,



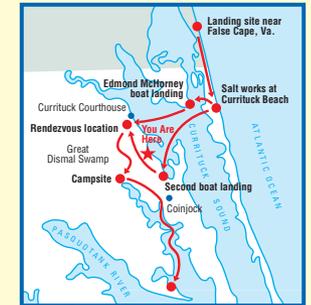
Maple Leaf – *Courtesy mapleleafshipwreck.com*

which Federal troops occupied. The party split into smaller groups, and B.F. McHorney led them across Indian Ridge to the Great Dismal Swamp.

When *Maple Leaf* returned to Fort Monroe and sounded the alarm four hours after the escape, Federal cavalrymen soon rode in pursuit while Federal gunboats prowled Currituck Sound, searching for the fugitives. Confederate local defense Capt. Willis B. Sanderlin, Co. B, 68th North Carolina Infantry (which the Federals branded a “guerrilla” force), helped conceal the former prisoners. Area citizens also fed and cared for the men,



Artifacts salvaged from *Maple Leaf*
Courtesy mapleleafshipwreck.com



Confederate escape routes from the Union steamship *Maple Leaf*.
Courtesy Harry P. Lee, Currituck Co. ITS-GIS

who eventually found their way to Richmond.

Maple Leaf continued to function as a troop transport until it struck a Confederate “torpedo” (floating mine) near Jacksonville, Florida, on April 1, 1864. The ship sank in the St. John’s River with its cargo, which included the baggage of three Union regiments. In the 1980s, archaeologists located the wreck—one of the great treasure troves of the Civil War—and salvaged thousands of artifacts.

The nearby community of Maple is named for the ship.