A Whale of a Tale

April Fools Day may come and go every year, but some fishy tales have lived on this campus for decades. In the spirit of the season, The Portico has done a little spring cleaning to help set the record straight. Below are a few of the most widespread legends at the College and how they all got started.

A 40’ whale skeleton hung in Randolph Hall for 34 years.
True. The young North Atlantic right whale was killed for oil in the Charleston Harbor in 1880, and by 1881 its skeleton was hanging in The Charleston Museum, which was housed on the third floor of Randolph Hall from 1852 to 1915. The whale – which nearly stretched to the restroom in Randolph Hall – still hangs from its original mounting rods in the lobby of The Charleston Museum (shown above).

The Wilson-Soutile House served as a brothel at one point in time.
False. Presumably due to the “ball and screw” motif of its wrought iron fence, this rumor has no historical accuracy, although the College did originally use the house as a female dormitory.

Farm animals used to have free reign over the Cistern yard.
True. When John Cahill – as the College’s new porter (aka, janitor) – moved into Porters Lodge in 1854, he brought his cow, chickens and goats to graze in the Cistern yard. Despite some grumblings from students, the animals were tolerated on the grounds for the next half-century.

The professor teaching class in Towell Library during the Civil War did not flinch when a cannonball crashed through the room.
False. Classes were not held in Towell Library during the Civil War, and there is no indication that a cannonball ever crashed through the library. An alternative to this story is that a fragment of a shell passed through the roof and onto a table at which a professor was seated. While The Portico was unable to disprove this story, it is highly unlikely: The campus was essentially abandoned from December 1864 to February 1866 while Charleston was under siege, and – despite extensive research – The Portico was unable to find any definitive historical data indicating that a shell hit Towell Library at all.

Randolph Hall was painted with the blood of oxen.
False. Despite what some tour guides may tell you, Randolph Hall, Towell Library and Porters Lodge were never touched by the blood of an ox, a bull or a cow. In fact, ox and bull blood were never used to make red – rather, they were boiled to produce a color known as “Prussian blue.” The confusion about the reddish pigment probably arose originally from the description of these buildings as being painted with oxblood, the definition of which is “a moderate reddish brown” – not “the blood of an ox.” The various rose and mauve hues of these buildings are actually the result of a limewash that used iron oxide as the colorant.

Every three years, the Tiffany windows of the Soutile House are sent to England to be cleaned.
False. The windows, which neither “predate Tiffany” as is often reported nor were made by Tiffany, are cleaned just like any other window … though perhaps with a bit more care!

Roach racing was once one of the College’s most popular sports.
True. The very popular roach races were part of the College’s annual Roach-a-Thon, a weeklong festival that began in 1980 as an Alpha Phi Omega fundraiser and that involved a parade, “roach safaris” and a roach stomp. The festivities culminated every year with a dance party where students, local businesses and area charities would gather in the Stern Center Garden to listen to live music, race roaches and crown the roach queen. Despite the popularity of the tradition, it died off after 1993.

Share your favorite College legends at theportico@cofc.edu.
You have to be a jack-of-all-trades when, on any given workday, you may be required to repair a sagging porch, install a sewer cleanout and rewire a defective electrical panel. But when you write, illustrate and publish a book of poetry on top it all, you’re downright protean.

“People are dynamic – we do what comes naturally,” shrugs Ronald McKelvey, a maintenance worker in Physical Plant who published his first book of poetry last year. “You’ve got to be real with yourself, that’s all it is.”

McKelvey started writing poetry as a student at Ft. Johnson High School. Although he dropped the hobby while he studied at the Art Institute of Atlanta, he picked it back up again when he was serving as a U.S. Army administrative specialist in Panama.

“I heard a lot of heartbreak and deception from the guys when they were talking on the phone to their wives,” McKelvey recalls. “It made me think about what’s really important, the things that come first in life.”

Love, family and soul are the themes of the resulting poems, a few of which he later allowed then–English Professor Nan Morrison to read. With her encouragement – and the support of staff and faculty campuswide – McKelvey published Genests of Love: A Very Special Flavor, which he hoped would help people realize the importance of love and understanding in the world.

“I always believe I can change things,” says McKelvey. “I want people to accept other people and where they’re coming from. The more you come to accept other people, the more positive things will come about.”

The positive feedback that McKelvey’s poetry brought about encouraged him to publish a second book. Entitled Life’s a Rollercoaster, this collection will go to print later this year.

“This one is going to wake you up,” says McKelvey. “I touch on things people don’t want to touch. I look at things most people try to overlook.”

Things like suicide, racial politics, life on the streets, drugs and war.

“I’m trying to do things that will make people feel and make people look around and understand what they see a little better,” says McKelvey. “I want people to see not only from my point of view, but from their own point of view so they can have a free mind, so they can see things that otherwise they couldn’t see.”

But life’s a rollercoaster, and McKelvey’s new collection isn’t all war and famine.

“I do a mood swing in the middle of the book,” he explains. “I’ll tell you like it is here, and then I’ll go into a transitional mode and hit you up with some love in the center, and then I bring it back to reality.”

It’s that kind of artistic control that McKelvey enjoys about both writing and compiling his poetry.

“I like having the freedom of expression,” he says. “Nobody can ask you about it, because that’s what you feel. No one can judge you because no one has the same thought process as you.”

So, what exactly is McKelvey’s thought process when he’s writing?

“It’s spontaneous. My ideas come out of nowhere. If it hits me, I’ve got to get it down. If something hits me while I’m sleeping, I get out of bed and write,” says McKelvey. “While you’re sleeping at 2 or 3 in the morning, I’m writing poetry.”

But McKelvey doesn’t mind sacrificing sleep for his craft. After all, he says, “That’s what makes a poet a poet.”

To purchase a copy of Genesis of Love, contact Ronald McKelvey at 345.6674. Look for both titles at the College bookstore and the Avery Research Center in the near future.
**OCEANS OF POSSIBILITY**

**For Helen Ivy, No Two Days Are Alike**

It’s said that variety is the spice of life, but – as anyone who’s ordered the Mexican dish with the three asterisks next to it knows – there is such a thing as too much spice. It’s a delicate balance to be sure, but it’s one that Helen Ivy, head librarian at the Marine Resources Library, has mastered.

“My day is very varied. No two days are ever the same,” says Ivy, who stays busy leading her staff of three, coordinating interlibrary loans, purchasing books, cataloging, monitoring electronic access to journals, helping library patrons find what they’re looking for and dealing with whatever problems and issues may arise.

“I like the variety of my duties and the variety of people I work with,” she says. “But, if you ask me what my least favorite part of my job is, that would be variety, too, just in a different sense.”

It’s the complex administrative aspect of heading the library that Ivy is referring to. The Marine Resources Library is supported not only by the College, but also by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)/Coastal Center for Environmental Health and Bimolecular Research at Charleston (CCEHBR) Laboratory. That means that – although she is employed by the College – she has to answer to all three funding agencies.

“Sometimes I think I’ve developed a split personality,” she laughs, explaining that she’s learned how to most effectively work with each of the three agencies to ensure that the services and funding they’re providing are equitable. “This job has taught me a lot about the art of diplomacy. It gives me such an understanding of human nature, believe it or not. Watching the three agencies work together – or refuse to – I’ve learned a great deal about people and about working with all kinds to accomplish a common goal.”

That common goal, of course, is to provide comprehensive marine science resources and services to the staff, faculty and students of the three institutions. Located next door to the Grice Marine Lab at Fort Johnson, the 4,160-square-foot library has 25,400 volumes, 24,500 monographic titles and 9,800 bound periodicals for researchers to pour over. It’s a peaceful spot with a soothing panoramic view of the Charleston Harbor.

“I like the setting. I like where I am. I like what I’m doing,” says Ivy, who first came to the College as a librarian in the main library in 1982 and moved to the Marine Resources Library in 1987. “At a large library, you’re pretty much focused on your one task – you don’t have the opportunity to see how the library works as a whole. Here, we get to see the big picture. We do everything that a large library does, only on a smaller scale.”

Regardless of scale, however, operating an entire library is no small task. Luckily, Ivy has what it takes: a dedicated staff and whole lot of enthusiasm.

“I think I have the greatest staff there is,” she says. “They love their jobs, and they do it well.”

It helps, of course, that Ivy does, too.

“I enjoy all aspects of library service. I enjoy the public side of it and the technical side of it,” she says. “That’s the sense of variety that I really like.”

That’s because, in the end, it’s what gives Ivy’s work its fullest flavor.

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**GARDENER’S PICK**

**Red Buckeye**

**AKA:** Aesculus pavia.

**ON CAMPUS:** Found on the inside left of the gate between Green and Coming Streets.

**DESCRIPTION:** This Southeast native grows 12–20’ and produces compound leaves that fan into large, toothed leaflets. From April to May, its clusters of showy red flowers attract bees, hummingbirds and butterflies. Brown, leathery fruit appears in early fall and remains on the tree throughout winter. All parts are poisonous to humans if ingested.

**WHERE TO PLANT:** Plant in moist, well-drained soil. Tolerates full sun, but blooms best in light–dense shade, which also helps curb mid-summer defoliation.

**TIPS:** To propagate from seed, allow fruit to dry on plant, break open to collect seeds and sow immediately. Take stem cuttings in late winter, just before new growth emerges, and keep in moist potting soil in a humid environment.
TRICOUGARS: Going the Distance, and Then Some

You may not have noticed, but they're everywhere – sitting across the conference table from you, passing you in the Cistern yard, even calling you on the phone. They may not stand out in the crowd, but these are no ordinary Cougars. These are TriCougars, and they're up for a challenge.

In fact, they're up for what some people consider the ultimate challenge: the triathlon.

“When you think about a triathlon – it's so big, it can seem impossible,” says Brian Lanahan, assistant professor of elementary and early childhood education and the organizer/faculty advisor for the College’s new triathlon club for students, staff and faculty. “It helps to train and compete as a team. The community aspect keeps you motivated – keeps you honest.”

Of course, the team atmosphere isn’t just a source of motivation – it’s what makes it fun.

“I really enjoy the camaraderie,” says North Campus Librarian Jannette Finch, a TriCougars who is also actively involved in the Charleston Triathlon Club. “It’s really nice to get to know people I otherwise wouldn’t have the chance to meet.”

Since they first met last fall, the TriCougars have built up a core group of regulars who come to most of the five hour-long practices every week, and another 10–15 who train on their own and compete with the team when they can.

“A lot of people just come out and practice one sport,” says Lanahan, explaining that the practices generally alternate between swimming, running and cycling. “It’s a multi-sport club, but you don’t have to do multiple sports to be a part of it.”

Unless you want to take on the ultimate challenge, that is.

Although some triathlons do have relay events for teams, most require each individual to spend some time in the water, on the bike and on the running path – whether it’s the sprint distance triathlon (5-mile swim, 15-mile cycle, 3.1-mile run) or the full Ironman triathlon (2.4-mile swim, 112-mile cycle, 26.2-mile run).

“There’s a running joke that triathletes are mediocre at three sports but good at none,” says Finch, who has finished eight triathlons a year since 1999.

Regardless of the saying, the TriCougars have proved themselves extraordinary athletes. They’ve participated together and won events in four triathlons so far, and this month they’re off to the Wilmington Athletic Club Triathlon and the USA Triathlon Collegiate National Championship.

“We have some tremendous, tremendous athletes on this campus,” says Lanahan. “These people are real rock stars.”

Feeling a little intimidated? Watch out: These uber-Cougars are only getting stronger.

“We’re always picking up more people,” says Lanahan. “Anyone can do this at some level. Not everyone is going to finish an Ironman, but everyone can train at some level. Anyone is welcome.”

And, as they say, if you can’t beat ‘em, you might as well join ‘em. ☝

To get involved with the TriCougars, visit tricougars.wordpress.com or contact Brian Lanahan at 953.2746 or lanahanb@cofc.edu.

TRASH TALK

It’s the final stretch! RecycleMania, the 10-week recycling and waste-reduction competition among colleges and universities nationwide, ends on April 5. As of Week Six (March 8) of the challenge, the College had collected 10,720 pounds of office paper, 4,420 pounds of cardboard and 2,020 pounds of glass, plastic and aluminum – enough to earn around $285 just for choosing the right bin. Want to help?

- Rinse dirty recyclables before placing them in the appropriately labeled recycling bins (dirty cans and bottles contaminate everything in the bin)
- Remove bottle caps before placing them in the bins (caps cannot be recycled and lower the value of a bale of plastic)
- Keep trash out of recycling bins (this includes coffee cups, dark-colored folders, paper with permanent ink on it and envelopes with plastic windows)

For updated RecycleMania numbers, and for more recycling tips, visit cofc.edu/~recycling/ or contact Burton Callcott at 953.0016 or callcottb@cofc.edu.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- Pile caps were poured and pile driving was finished for the new science center last month. Next month work will begin on the underground rough-in.
- In March, the second-floor slab, columns and shear walls were poured for the School of the Arts addition. In April, third-floor forms, rebar and post-tension cables will be placed.
- At the Carolina First Center/John Kresse Arena, the mechanical, electrical and plumbing rough-ins began last month and will continue through April, when the freight elevator will be installed and renovations to the Silcox Center mechanical room will begin.
- Both 7 and 9 College Street are in the post-construction phase. This month, a final completion is expected for the former and a substantial completion is expected for the latter.
Most people pull out of the Burger King drive-thru with a Whopper, a Coke and an order of fries. More than 10 years ago, Dorinda Harmon pulled out with a kids’ meal prize and the beginnings of what she calls “one big dysfunctional tater family.” Now with some 40 taters — including a police officer, a princess bride and a Mardi Gras king, not to mention Darth Tater, Spider Spud and the hot potato blurt out terse commands (“Get off my lawn!”) – Harmon’s unintended Mr. Potato Head collection definitely has character. “You get to make any kind of tater you need to fit your mood,” says the director of adult student services, rummaging through one of her plastic cases of potato arms, lips, shoes, hats and accessories. “It’s all about fun, and it’s all up to you.” In other words, you get to “Have It Your Way.”

NEWS BRIEFS: News You Can Use

- Amy McCandless has been named the permanent dean of the Graduate School and associate provost for research after serving as interim dean for nearly two years.
- Corrigan Gallery, at 62 Queen St., is featuring the works of John Hull, chair of the studio art department, and Manning Williams ’63, studio arts adjunct faculty member, April 4–29. For more information, contact the gallery at 722.9868.
- For a second year in a row, U.S. News and World Report named the College’s First-Year Experience program as one of the top 25 first-year experience programs in the nation.
- All College departments, clubs and organizations are invited to participate in the Orientation Information Fair this summer. Requests to participate must be received by May 16. For more information, visit cofc.edu/~orientat/ or contact Stephanie Auwaerter at 953.5557 or auwarters@cofc.edu.
- Wild Dunes Resort offers College employees discounted rates on accommodations and golf. For more information, contact Matt Marcino at 886.2216 or mmarcino@wilddunes.com.
- AT&T offers College employees a 15% discount off their monthly service charges for wireless calling plans. For more information, contact Bobby Knight at 327.1121 or BobbyKnight@getcingular.com.
**Guess What??**

What in the world could it be?

Thanks to everyone who participated in last month’s photo quiz, and congratulations to Brenda Burbage, budget manager and FRS/HRS security coordinator in budgeting and payroll services, who was the first to guess that the object in question was one of the decoy owls over the Cistern yard. The three plastic owls that dangle like ornaments from the live oaks in front of Randolph Hall were hung by Physical Plant to deter yellow-crowned night herons and other birds from roosting in the trees.

Take a look at the picture above. The object can be found on campus. Do you know what it is? The first person to submit the correct answer will win a tasty lunch for two at Liberty Street Fresh Food Company, compliments of ARAMARK. Good luck!

Send your submission to lutza@cofc.edu by Friday, April 18, 2008. The contest is open to all College faculty and staff. One submission per person, please.

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**Word on the Bricks**

**What’s the FIRST THING YOU DO AFTER A HARD DAY OF WORK?**

Niki DeWeese, Assistant Director of Recruitment, Graduate School Office

“The first thing I do after a hard day of work is hit the racquetball courts at my gym for an hour. I’m not great, but I’m getting better!”

Calvin Blackwell, Associate Professor of Economics and Finance

“The first thing I do after a hard day of work is head home to see my wife and 3-year-old son, Kai. He’s always full of energy and after spending all day together, both my son and my wife are excited to see me come home!”

Matthew Canepa, Assistant Professor of Art History

“Lately it feels like ‘collapse, wake up, repeat.’”

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