

Memorial Exhibit for Ralph Scott Showcases Ship Plan

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A memorial is displayed for East Carolina University honorary professor emeritus Ralph Scott on the first floor of the main campus library.

When Joe Barricella looks at the Ralph L. Scott Memorial Exhibit located on the first floor of East Carolina University’s main campus library, many thoughts surface. One of them is simple, yet powerful.

“I think we would have made Ralph proud,” Barricella said.

Scott, 80, who joined the ECU library faculty in 1971 and was rare books curator in October 2022 at the time of his death, had a love for North Carolina history and ships. Some of Scott’s research culminated in his 2017 book, *The Wilmington Shipyard: Welding a Fleet for Victory in World War II*.

He started the now-completed exhibit, which focuses on 1800s shipbuilder William Webb and the 380-foot vessel *Dunderberg*, commissioned by the U.S. Navy in 1862. After Scott’s death, Barricella, the library’s head of digital collections, emerged as project leader and worked with maritime studies graduate students Katelyn Rollins and Kendra Ellis from the Department of History.

In addition to the physical exhibit, complementary materials, including additional ship plans, are available in ECU’s Digital Collections. “Dunderberg” translates

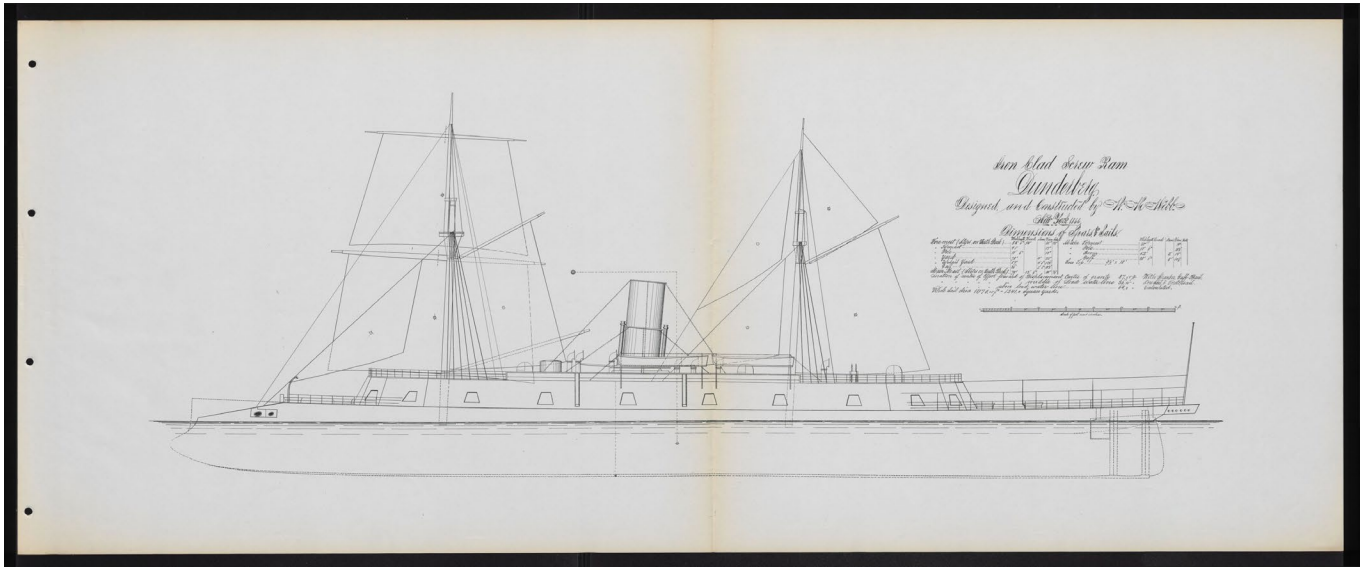
to “thundering mountain” in Swedish and, because of delays in pursuit of fine-tuning a state-of-the-art ship, it did not see service in the U.S. military and was eventually sold to France. See the first page of the digitized Dunderberg plans in the Digital Collections.¹

A desire to finish the exhibit was discussed during a library special collections exhibit committee meeting. Barricella, who previously worked at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort, seized the opportunity to honor Scott.

“Most of my interactions with Ralph were at library-wide meetings. I also regularly saw him exercising on campus, and we would stop and chat for a moment,” Barricella said. “Ralph had a really eccentric sense of humor. That is something I’ll definitely miss, is his sense of humor. I felt fairly comfortable with the exhibit topic because it was ship-related, and we had two maritime studies students working in our department.

“I knew the exhibit had a good chance of being successful because it brought together the students’ research expertise and knowledge of ships in general, and my exhibit and graphic design experience. Their maritime

¹ Webb, William Henry. *Plans of wooden vessels selected as types: from one hundred and fifty of various kinds and descriptions, from a fishing smack to the largest clipper ships and vessels of war, both sail and steam, v. 2*. 1897. East Carolina University Digital Collections. <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/62674>. Accessed 30 Jun. 2023.

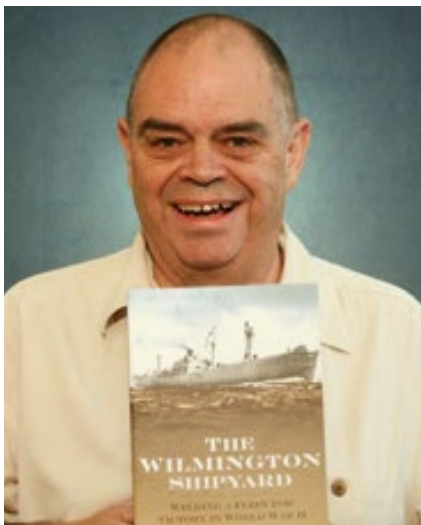


Dunderberg drawing. East Carolina University Digital Collections. <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/62674.50>

knowledge and research skills were critical to getting this exhibit finished.”

Aside from one photograph from the Library of Congress, all other material used in the exhibit can be accessed in ECU’s main campus library. Academic Library Services staff members Jon Dembo and Larry Houston also contributed to preparation of the exhibit’s content, in addition to the research provided by graduate students Kendra Ellis and Katelyn Rollins.

“I think it is pretty cool,” Ellis said. “I walk by it a lot. ... Ship construction is not my specialty, but for undergrad I focused on anthropology with a concentration in archeology. I’ve been scuba diving since I was 16 and when I took my first archeology class, I realized I could combine the two and thought, ‘OK, this is for me.’ I’m interested in lost cities underwater.”



Ralph Scott, 2017

Ellis and Rollins did not know Scott personally, but they became aware of his accolades and interests as they conducted research for the exhibit.

“His book is based in Wilmington, so it’s local and about North Carolina history, and with William Webb being a shipbuilder at the turn of the century, I think it parallels very well,” Rollins said. “To honor Ralph in this way, it’s definitely a topic he knew a lot about and was interested in.”

In his more than 50 years at ECU, Scott obtained the rank of full professor and served in numerous leadership roles in the library and university faculty senate committees. He was active in the ECU chapter of the American Association of University Professors and served as a UNC System faculty assembly delegate. He also served on the board of directors of the Historical Society of North Carolina and the North Carolina Library Association.

Scott was appointed honorary professor emeritus in January by ECU Chancellor Philip Rogers. In addition to his decades of impact at ECU, Academic Library Services director Jan Lewis emphasized Scott’s well-rounded approach to statewide library services.

“One of his most enduring contributions was as long-time editor, editorial board member and regular columnist for *North Carolina Libraries*, the official peer-reviewed publication of the North Carolina Library Association,” Lewis said. “Ralph is dearly missed by the ECU community and colleagues throughout the state and beyond.”