

# County baseball sports rich tradition

## Self-appointed historian Joe 'Boy' Willis digs deep to compile accurate records

BY J.J. SMITH  
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**HARKERS ISLAND** — "Baseball, almost alone among our sports, traffics unashamedly and gloriously in nostalgia, for only baseball understands time and treats it with respect. The history of other sports seems to begin anew with each generation, but baseball, that wondrous myth of 20<sup>th</sup> century America, gets passed on like an inheritance."

Those words, spoken by author Stanley Cohen, may as well be Joe "Boy" Willis' mantra.

The Harkers Island native is exhaustively documenting the history of Carteret County baseball before it is lost to future

generations.

"The reason I'm doing this is because I've had friends that have died, and their stories died with them," said Willis. "We are losing so many stories with these gentlemen passing away. There was no written documentation of the past games and leagues, and today we have detailed data on games, statistics, which players played on which teams, etc."

"We now have the ability to read the stories of every player that played in these leagues and can pass them down through the generations."

Willis told some of those stories last Saturday during the reunion of 45 past Carteret County baseball coaches at the Core Sound



Joe "Boy" Willis gives a presentation on Carteret County baseball history last Saturday at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum. Willis has collected 6,500 pages of information on past teams, players, coaches and games. (J.J. Smith photo)

Waterfowl Museum.

He regaled the crowd with tales of some of the best players to ever play in the county. Men such as Morehead City's James Webb, Beaufort's Jack Gardner and Davis' Elvin Davis, all who played in the 1940s.

He also spoke of the great 1953 Atlantic team that won the county championship.

"That team featured some of the best talent this county has ever seen," said Willis. "John Hamilton, who was a great hitter and catcher, Don Willis, a great pitcher, Gary Morris, Jack Rose, Buddy Willis, Johnny Willis and Joe Willis. There were four or five players on that team that could have gone pro, but they didn't want to leave Atlantic. As funny as that sounds, there has probably been 40 to 50 guys over the years that have chosen Carteret County over profession-

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Atlantic won the 1953 Carteret County League Championship by defeating Newport in a three-game playoff. Members of the team were, left to right: front row, Joe Willis, Roy McKamey, Grover Willis (manager), Harry Gerock, Myron Willis (batboy), Julian Willis, Braxton Taylor; back row, Bryan Salter (scorekeeper), John Hamilton, Buddy Willis, Gary Morris, Johnny Willis, Rodney Taylor, Rodney Smith, Don Willis and Jack Rose. (Photo courtesy of *The Mailboat*)