

THE BELLE OF ROSE ISLE



A model-maker's case study of The Reverend Robert Rose's Double Dug-Out Canoe.

BY ROBERT J. FAUGHT

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Bob Faught's new book should especially appeal to everyone interested in central Virginia, in the history of tobacco, and in the history of river transportation. We hope that it will lead to the official designation of Nelson County as "The Birthplace of the Rose Double Dugout Canoe"; to an historic marker at the Rose plantation on the Tye River; and to the building of a full-size experimental model of a Rose double canoe, to try out on the Tye and the James. That's because in his book, Major Robert J. Faught has created the first detailed study of the water craft developed by the Reverend Robert Rose and his boat builder Richard Ripley.

The Rose canoe was invented in 1748/49, a quarter of a century before the Rucker Brothers invented the James River Batteau. Rose had plantations in Nelson and Amherst counties. He needed a water craft which could haul his tobacco hogsheads, and those of his friends, down the Tye and the James to the Port of Richmond. By building dugout canoes from large trees and lashing two together like a catamaran, his men could navigate the still untamed falls of the river. After the boats unloaded at Westham landing, above Richmond, they were separated and poled back upstream for another load.

Rose describes the invention of the double canoe in his diary, published by Ralph Fall in 1977. This is essentially the only source of information about these boats, but it includes almost nothing about the details of construction. Bob Faught has taken this information and made models and drawings to speculate about them. We hope that readers will join his investigation and help continue his research.

The 58-page book was published by Holt Messerly for the Virginia Canals & Navigations Society. Copies are available at \$20 plus postage from the canal society at www.vacanals.org, or from Richard A. Davis, 4066 Turnpike Rd., Lexington, VA 24450, 540-463-677. Wholesale discounts are available to those buying over ten copies for resale: contact Holt@vacanals.org.