



The Hermit of
FORT FISHER

**BASED ON THE TRUE STORY
OF ROBERT HARRILL.**

BY DAVID WRIGHT

APRIL 2-12

BIGDAWGPRODUCTIONS.ORG

The Hermit of Fort Fisher

By David Anthony Wright

Directed by Steve Vernon

Set Design by Donna Troy

Set Construction - Donna Troy, Lily Nicole, Alissa Nelson and
Cameron Cates

Light Design by Hannah Funderburke

Sound Design by Steve Vernon

Sound Engineering by Bryana Fortner

Costume Design by Elise Cooley

Stage Manager - Riley Farmer

Board Operators - Tyrell Cox and Bryana Fortner

Audio Recordings of Mr. Stefl facilitated by

Brent Schraff and BJS Voiceover

Publicity Stills and Video by James Bowling, Terri Hsu, and
Chad Hsu

Graphic Design by Zach Peschl

Assistant to Mr. Mastin and Baker of Treats and All-Around
Heroine, Lisa Mastin

About The Show

Based on the true story of Robert Harrell. At the age of sixty-two, finding himself a failure in every aspect of his life, he disappeared from his home in the North Carolina foothills, turning up three months later in the marshland around Ft. Fisher, just below Wilmington. Taking up residence in an abandoned WWII bunker, without benefit of electricity, water, or plumbing, he spent the next seventeen years, living off the bounty of the ocean and the kindness of strangers. Curiosity about this “hermit” eventually brought thousands of people to see him, to have their picture taken with him, and to listen to his “common sense” philosophy. It made him the second biggest tourist attraction on the Carolina coast, after the USS North Carolina Battleship Memorial. It made him a success. His mysterious death is still mourned by people who tear-up at his memory.

Cast In Order of Appearance

Kent West.....	Empie Hewett
Woody Stefl.....	Robert Harrill
Heather M. Lindquist-Bull.....	Tourist Wife, Nurse, Various
James Bowling.....	Tourist Husband, Hinson
Jamie Lane.....	Edward Harrill
Jake Brenden Taylor.....	Frank Peeler
Eben French Mastin.....	Dr. William Marcus Taylor
Rich Jimenez.....	Norton
Susan Auten.....	Katie Harrill
Shawn Sproatt.....	Adele Lee, Robert's Stepmother, Various
Connor Perry.....	Young Man 1(Rustin)
Kristopher Houghton.....	Young Man 2 (Young Jake)
Nick Smith.....	Visitor Father
Andi Smith.....	Visitor Mother
Mason Smith.....	Young Robert, Visitor Son
Jason Bowers.....	Stanley Southard
Terri Hsu.....	the Voice of Mrs. Taylor
Aleah Lacey.....	Carolyn

Bios (In Order of Appearance)

Kent West (Empie Hewitt) is a native of Durham, NC, and has now spent more than half of his life in Wilmington...he's starting to feel like a local. Kent is very happy to again be part of a Big Dawg Theater Company show, joining this wonderful cast and crew to tell the story of Robert E. Harrill. He was most recently seen in Santa Claus Conquers the Martians (Kimar, Martian King) and To Kill A Mockingbird (Walter Cunningham). Kent would like to thank Steve for casting him (almost) as a Mime, relieving him of the stress of memorizing lines.

Woody Stefl (Robert Harrill) - "Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." -Henry David Thoreau

Heather M. Lindquist-Bull (Tourist Wife/Nurse/TV Reporter/Crowd Member) is honored to be a part of this beautiful production that depicts the life and passions of a local, human treasure. When not assisting clients as a real estate broker with The Cameron Team at Coldwell Banker Sea Coast Advantage, she's enjoyed performing with Big Dawg Productions (The Exonerated, The Mousetrap, Extra! Extra! The Musical), TACT (The Wedding Singer, Damn Yankees, Steel Magnolias, Death of a Salesman), OHTC (Billy Elliott), PCP (His Inner Fido), Honey Head Films and Lotura Films (Kima & Amik, animated voice-over work). Heather sends gratitude to her partner (Jason) and The Pack, guardian angels, family-by-choice, Team, Steve Vernon, our "fascinating"ly fabulous cast, crew, and creatives, David Anthony Wright, Robert E. Harrill and family, and all who appreciate and celebrate uniqueness and humanity.

James Bowling (Tourist Husband, Hinson) is proud to be a part of this historical play and working with Big Dawg again. Thanks to Joel and the kids for letting him come out and play.

Jamie Lane (Edward) is a local actor who is incredibly grateful to be working with such a great and talented cast and crew! He can be seen on shows such as Jimmy Kimmel Live and movies such as "Birdies", and is currently working his first semester as the theatre teacher at Pender High School, where he is directing Aladdin Jr.

Jake Brenden Taylor (Deputy Peeler) is excited to be a part of his first Big Dawg Production. Steve Vernon has been an incredible director to work with. Jake is very humbled and honored to be a part of this wonderfully talented cast. Having just finished a run of To Kill a Mockingbird (Boo Radley, u/s Atticus Finch), to now, the story of The Hermit of Fort Fisher, Jake is excited at the opportunity to help tell the tale of Wilmington's very own local legend.

Eben French Mastin (Dr. Taylor) is a past president and nine-year member of the Board of Directors of Brunswick Little Theatre. He's had the distinct pleasure of playing the hermit in all five previous productions. At one time, the hermit was the second largest tourist attraction in NC, next to the battleship. While living in a Fort Fisher bunker, he trained survival skills to the army. This play is based on

the true story of the life and death of Robert Harrill. Cause of death is considered a cold case. Decide for yourself.

Rich Jimenez (Norton) is a professional actor from NYC, now retired and residing in Downtown Wilmington. He is happy making his debut appearance in NC, with Big Dawg Theatre Company. Notables: Broadway Theatrical- (2022) "Guys & Dolls" (2015) "West Side Story." Off Broadway- (2018) "The Lemon Tree", "Rules of the Game" (2016) "For Your Eyes Only" (2015) "The Kempinski Surprise." Regional- (2016) "12 Angry Men" (2015) "The Seafarer" (2014) "The Underpants (2013) "A View from the Bridge" (2012) "The Odd Couple." And dozens more...

Susan Auten (Katie Harrill) is very excited to be returning to the stage with Big Dawg Theatre Company. Last seen in Parallel Lives, she has been acting in Wilmington for over 20 years. She would like to thank Big Dawg for the opportunity, the cast and crew for the laughs and a great experience, Steve Vernon for "settling," and YOU for supporting live local theatre!

Shawn Sproatt (Adele Lee, Stepmother, Visitor) was a member of the original Wilmington cast of The Hermit of Fort Fisher back in 2014 and is honored to be reprising some of the same roles that first introduced her to the Wilmington theater community. Other beloved roles in town have been Carol in Laughter on the 23rd Floor, Maddie in The Dog Logs, and one of the kids in The Thanksgiving Play. Many thanks to Steve for letting her be a part of this cast, and much love to her friends and family for the constant love and support.

Connor Perry (Rustin-Young Man 1) is thrilled to be making his Big Dawg debut! An active member of the Wilmington theatre community, Connor was nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role at the 2025 Wilmington Theatre Awards and 2024 Thalian Awards for his performance in the titular role in The SpongeBob SquarePants Musical. He extends his sincere thanks to Steve Vernon for trusting him in a production so integral to Wilmington's history.

Kristopher Houghton (Young Jake-Young Man 2) is a student at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. He has worked in many shows back in Fayetteville, North Carolina in High School and Regional theater, including Into The Woods, Sister Act, and Our Town. This is his first Production with Big Dawg Theatre!

Nick Smith (Visitor Father, Crowd Member) is excited to return to the stage with Big Dawg. He's recently been seen on stage in Windows and The Thanksgiving Play; he's also directed Romantic Comedy and Picasso at the Lapin Agile for the company. He's been crafting and perfecting the role of annoying husband and doting father for over 10 years, and is thrilled to finally bring it to an audience alongside his actual family, who have done so much to help him prepare.

Mason Smith (Young Robert Harrill, Visitor Son) is stoked to make his Big Dawg debut - and with his parents no less! He first took the stage in the TACT rookie production of Alice in Wonderland. He's grateful to Steve and the cast for giving him such a comprehensive list of words to NEVER say. He dedicates his performance to his lifelong scene partners - his stuffies.

Andi Angel (Visitor Mother) is jubilated to be present. She agreed to make her Big Dawg debut at the sweetest, most relentless prodding of her young son, who was head over heels at the once in a lifetime chance to share the stage with his parents. Those who live at home with Andi may recall her weekly performances in OMG, We Got Up Late Again?! and Shoes On Now! where she routinely acts a fool. She'd like to thank the cast and crew, the Force Ghost of Steve Vernon, and the dedicated insistence of her husband and son; she literally wouldn't be here without them.

Jason Bowers (Stanley Southard) is an actor and writer originally from Garnerville, New York and is proud to make his Wilmington debut with Big Dawg Theatre Company. He previously was a Kommittee (yes that is how it's spelled) member and frequent performer with Cornell University's historic Risley Theatre, wherein he appeared in almost a dozen plays such as Julius Caesar (playing

over 20 different ensemble roles), Marat/Sade (The Trumpet Inmate), Cyrano de Bergerac (The Burgher/Captain Carbon) and the original play The Prince's Bride (Prince Lothar). Locally he was heavily involved in the film industry and worked on over 25 productions as a featured extra, production assistant, and/or stand-in. As an amateur historian, he is honored to play a part in bringing this piece of local history to life alongside such a talented cast.

Terri Hsu (Voice of Mrs. Taylor) is thrilled to have been able to lend her voice to this production and serves as Board President of Big Dawg Theatre Company.

Aleah Lacey (Carolyn) is a fifth grader. Aleah is thrilled to be making her stage debut as the hermit's granddaughter. She wants to thank the cast for making her feel welcome and to Steve for letting her be in the play with her "real" papaw.

Riley Farmer (stage manager) is thrilled to be part of the Hermit of Ft. Fisher crew. If she could be a hermit anywhere, it would be outside a Diet Coke factory. This is her sixth production with Big Dawg.

Steve Vernon (Director) dabbles in theatre in his spare time, when he's not performing his duties as artistic director for Big Dawg.

Special Thanks to Brent Schraff, Jason Aycock, Opera House Theater Company, The Arts Council of Wilmington, Charles Calhoun, Kent West, Jake Taylor, Woody Stefl, Stephanie Scheu Aman, David Anthony Wright, YOU, and All of our Significant Others, Children, Pets, Employers, Co-workers, Debtors, Obligations and Responsibilities for allowing Us to carve out some time to Play.

Big Dawg's Mission

To produce entertaining, thought provoking, and socially responsible theatre, with and emphasis on involoving youth and the community in the performing arts.

Board Of Directors

Terri Hsu.....President
Zach Peschl.....Vice President
Chad Hsu.....Treasurer
Courtney Harding.....Secertary
Jennifer Cox, Jeff Loy, Benjamin ThomasReid
Steve Vernon.....Artistic Director

AND

Our small, but dedicated group, of community advisors and volunteers who work in the community to support the company in fundraising, and outreach.

Get Involved

If you are interested in becoming a board member or volunteering with Big Dawg Productions send a message to BigDawgPro@gmail.com

A Big Thank You To Our Amazing Donors & Sponsors!

Big Dawg Productions extends its sincere thanks to all those who donated to us in the last year. Every dollar supports local theatre, local actors and crews, and allows us to continue bringing unique and thought provoking (or at least funny) theatre to the stage and expand our community impact with new programs.

Grant Sponsors

The Arts Council of Wilmington/NHC, The Landfall Foundation, The Wilson Center at Cape Fear Community College

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Dr. LucyBeth Nieves, Arriba & Topher Davis, R E Frerichs MD & Tony Harrelson, Cynthia McNeil, Ned & Arleen Rhodes

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April 16-19
A Ride Through the Country

by Ray Kennedy

A lot can happen on a ride through Eastern North Carolina in the Spring!

This encore production by playwright Ray Kennedy explores friendship, love and hope. Sometimes funny and sometimes poignant, the play introduces you to characters who, with their humor and nostalgia, paint a beautiful portrait of community, family, and courage in the face of adversity. When Louie, the matriarch of her Southern family, finds herself having to travel 45 miles each way for her almost daily cancer treatments, her friends and family decide to go along for the ride, filling the time with memories, laughter, and conversations about the importance of Tupperware.

A Ride Through The Country is based on true events.

May 14-17, 21-24

Men On Boats

by Jaclyn Backhaus

A wildly inventive, razorsharp comedy that reimagines the 1869 expedition of John Wesley Powell and his crew as they chart the uncharted canyons of the American West. Ten explorers. Four boats. One Grand Canyon—and no men. In this daring, hilarious retelling, an ensemble of women and female-presenting performers take on the roles of rugged adventurers, flipping the script on history and exploring who gets to tell the story of discovery. Filled with humor, heart, and breathtaking theatricality, Men on Boats is a thrilling journey through uncharted territory—past and present.

“[MEN ON BOATS] is marvelously destabilizing both as history and theater. The stalwartness and selfishness of the adventurers—their cockiness and cluelessness—become biting satire when sent up by women.”

—New York Magazine.

July 9-12, 16-19
The Shark is Broken

by Ian Shaw and Joseph Nixon

The first summer blockbuster movie is being filmed, but no one working on the movie would know it. Dive deep into the tumultuous, murky waters of the making of a major motion picture with testy, feuding costars, unpredictable weather, and a shark prop whose constant breakdowns are looking like an omen for the future of the movie. In this comedy cowritten by Ian Shaw and Joseph Nixon, the short tempers of **Jaws** stars Robert Shaw (father of cowriter Ian), Richard Dreyfuss, and Roy Scheider take center stage as they bond, argue, drink, gamble, and pray for an end to the shoot, not knowing it will change their lives forever.

“The script never lets interest lag over the play’s ninety, intermissionless minutes, the tension, humor, depth, silliness and horror coming like waves lapping the boat.”

—**Associated Press.**

“THE SHARK IS BROKEN wittily excels not just as a clever time capsule, but as an examination of male bonding and competitiveness, ego, frailty, fame, and filmmaking.”

—**The Daily Beast.**

“Laughs aplenty.”

—**Entertainment Weekly.**

August 13-16, 20-23
The Explorers Club

by Nell Benjamin

London, 1879. The prestigious Explorers Club is in crisis: their acting president wants to admit a woman, and their bartender is terrible. True, this female candidate is brilliant, beautiful, and has discovered a legendary Lost City, but the decision to let in a woman could shake the very foundation of the British Empire, and how do you make such a decision without a decent drink?

Grab your safety goggles for some very mad science involving deadly cobras, irate Irishmen and the occasional airship.

“You don’t have to be British to lose your composure and howl with laughter at THE EXPLORERS CLUB, a witty spoof of all those bold Victorian adventurers who ravaged foreign lands and annihilated indigenous cultures in the name of science.”

—Variety.

October 15-18, 22-25

Chemical Imbalance: A Jekyll and Hyde Play

by Lauren Wilson

A fast-paced, wickedly funny reimagining of Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic tale. In this contemporary adaptation, Dr. Henry Jekyll is a brilliant but socially awkward psychiatrist who experiments with a revolutionary drug designed to “cure” the darker impulses of his most troubled patient—himself. When the volatile and uninhibited Edward Hyde emerges, chaos erupts in a blur of mistaken identities, outrageous encounters, and razor-sharp comedy. Blending gothic suspense with laugh-out-loud farce, *Chemical Imbalance* explores the duality within us all—proving that sometimes the scariest monster is the one we’ve tried hardest to suppress.

“An evening of exhilarating entertainment... An inventive, original comedy of horrors.”

– **San Francisco Examiner**



Theatre for All is a 501(c)(3) non-profit company whose mission is to empower people with disabilities, nurture community connections and overturn stereotypes through the performing arts.

TheatreForAll.org

“The humor is nonstop, but cannot cover the highly sinister aspects of the plot...”

– San Francisco Bay Times

December 10-13, 17-20

Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol

By Tom Mula

“Marley was dead, to begin with...” —and what happens to Ebenezer Scrooge’s mean, sour, pruney old business partner after that? Chained and shackled, Marley is condemned to a hellish eternity. He’s even given his own private tormentor: a malicious little hell-sprite who thoroughly enjoys his work. Desperate, Marley accepts his one chance to free himself: To escape his own chains, he must first redeem Scrooge. So begins a journey of laughter and terror, redemption and renewal, during which Scrooge’s heart, indeed, is opened; but not before Marley—in this irreverent, funny and deeply moving story—discovers his own.

“Of all the holiday shows dotting the theatrical landscape, none shines brighter than Jacob Marley’s Christmas Carol.”

– The Life

“Delectably zany... inspired theatre... gives the audience cause to ache, and to laugh, and in the end, to exalt.”

– City Beat

1995

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A RIDE THROUGH THE COUNTRY



A NEW PLAY BY RAY KENNEDY



MEN ON BOATS



BY JACLYN BACKHAUS



"A WILD RIDE WORTH TAKING!"
ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY



THE SHARK IS BROKEN

BY IAN SHAW AND JOSEPH NIXON



The Explorers Club



By Nell Benjamin



CHEMICAL IMBALANCE

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by Lauren Wilson

TWICE THE PERSONALITY. TWICE THE LAUGHS.

A MADCAP COMEDY OF MONSTROUS PROPORTIONS



Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol



By Tom Mula

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