



Old News

Circa 2001

The Latest from Outer Banks Conservationists

Keepers of the Currituck Beach Lighthouse

At sundown on December 1, 1875, the Currituck Beach Lighthouse was illuminated for the first time, providing a welcomed beacon for seamen traveling in the dangerous waters off the Currituck Outer Banks. On December 1, 2000, Corolla residents and visitors commemorated the 125th anniversary of the first illumination with a special celebration and anniversary lighting at sundown.

The quasiquicentennial anniversary celebration took place on the lighthouse grounds, with more than 120 people in attendance. Pastor John Strauss of the Corolla Chapel opened the event with an invocation. Chief Petty Officer Thomas E. Guess of the U.S. Coast Guard Cape Hatteras Group spoke to the crowd about the Coast Guard's role in the lighthouse (they took it over from the hands of the U.S. Lighthouse Bureau when it was auto-



Currituck Beach Lighthouse: Lighting the Way for 125 Years

mated in 1939), and Lightkeeper Lloyd Childers welcomed all of the guests and gave a talk on the history of Corolla. Several longtime Corolla residents and people who have strong ties to the area contributed to the program. Native Corollan Norris Austin spoke about the time when his grandfather was the lightkeeper, and native Gene Austin

and his wife, Shirley, told of their duties as lightkeepers for the Coast Guard. Sharon Twiddy, Dru Hodges and Buck Thornton also shared their thoughts about Corolla and the lighthouse. As the sun was headed for the horizon, Owen McDonnell heralded the event with a bagpipe rendition of Amazing

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Restoring the Etheridge Homeplace



With its Currituck Beach Lighthouse restoration nearly completed, Outer Banks Conservationists is moving forward with its next restoration project – the old Etheridge Homeplace on Roanoke Island.

Nearly the oldest house on Roanoke Island, built in the 1840s, the Etheridge Homeplace is one of the few intact nineteenth-century farmhouses

left on the island. The two-story frame structure, located approximately two miles northwest of downtown Manteo, is on a two-and-a-half-acre site that was part of a 105-acre farm in 1899. The site surrounding the house is part of an even older 150-acre tract acquired by Jesse Etheridge in 1783. Many structures were once on the farm – slavehouses, barns, animal

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Keeper's Log, September 2001



On December 1, 1997, Pat Riley, the assistant keeper, handed me a key to the Lighthouse, Keepers' House, and historic Storage Building that would serve as my office. One key, the key to all the buildings within the lighthouse compound. "That's all you'll need," he said, and was off, leaving me clutching a small key on a ring with a brass plate inscribed "C.B.L.H." What a day! I was a real lighthouse keeper.

Since that day, three and a half years ago, the myriad duties of a modern-day lighthouse keeper have never ceased to amaze me. My service is not distinguished as a keeper of the flame, someone who climbs the tower several times a night to fuel the lamp, trim the wick and wind the rotating mechanism that made the light flash. Neither do my responsibilities include polishing the lens, painting the ironwork, whitewashing the interior of the tower or finding food for my family. Nevertheless, the duties are legion, and the one master key has been joined by a host of other necessary keys.

Now, keys to the post office box, the lock on the Keepers' House gate, the restrooms, the work shed, the dumpster and the 24-hour bank depository are included on the key ring.

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pens, outbuildings, a vineyard and a root cellar — but only the house, several pecan trees and three ancient oaks remain.

Restoring the house falls logically under the aegis of OBC, whose primary mission is conservation of place on the Outer Banks. The house and a half-acre tract were given to OBC by three fifth- and sixth-generation Etheridge descendants several years ago. Since then, OBC has acquired additional land around the house, including the family cemetery and a plot of land near the road that now houses a sheep pen for a local weaver. OBC hopes to acquire even more property around the homeplace as the project continues.

To start the project, the OBC board of directors hired a team of research and restoration experts. Architectural historian Peter Sandbeck, who has worked with Tryon Palace and Historic Williamsburg, researched the house, and historian Penne Smith completed a research report on the Etheridge family, their land transactions and the time period. In addition, archaeologist Jane Eastman and restoration expert Dean Ruedrich are working on the house and homesite.

"These are great people," said Bill Parker, chairman of Outer Banks Conservationists. "With a team like that, how can you go wrong?"

The 1840s house, a two-story, single-pile dwelling with a detached kitchen, was renovated and expanded from the 1870s through 1900 in the turn-of-the-century style. The second floor was extended and a two-story rear ell was attached to the house, plus, fireplace chimneys were moved indoors to incorporate stoves, ceilings were lowered, and beaded board used to cover the walls. Smith's report states that these changes reflect both the Etheridge family's prosperity in the agricultural and maritime businesses and the fact that the house housed eight

or ten people at a time during those years. Etheridge descendants lived in the house until the 1960s, and then the house left the family for a few years. Etheridge descendants bought the house in the 1980s to save it from destruction.

Since there are many examples of turn-of-the-century houses and few examples of nineteenth-century houses on the Outer Banks, OBC made the decision to restore the Etheridge house to its 1840s appearance, for the purpose of interpreting for the general public what life was like in the mid-nineteenth century. Smith determined that there is enough documentation to re-create the environment that was once familiar to the early Etheridges. Later photographs, including aerials, of the farmstead have survived.

Exact interpretation of the 1840s appearance of the homesite is a difficult feat, since there is less information available about that time period. At this writing, the crew was unsure of the location of the barns, kitchen, slave cabins, animal pens and other outbuildings. Archaeologist Jane Eastman, professor of anthropology at East Carolina University, began work in mid-May, trying to solve the puzzles of where the original porch and remote buildings were located.

Eastman and an assistant uncovered the front porch area first, looking for the original porch piers. They didn't find them, but turned up several interesting artifacts, including an 1890s penny, boardgame pieces, lead balls from a gun, buttons, a ring, a piece of a glazed earthenware pipe, pottery and hand-blown window glass. Eastman, who has done archaeological work on both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sites around the state, also tried to locate the outbuildings. Searching for things long gone can be a shot in the dark, so before Eastman began digging, the site was tested with remote sensing technology, ground penetrating



radar and soil samples. These tests provided several clues, including where animal pens were most likely located and where tin-roofed buildings stood.

As for the house, Ruedrich and two assistants first made structural repairs and put on a cedar roof. They also removed the late-nineteenth and twentieth-century additions, including the front porch, the siding and the back addition, leaving a bare-bones structure that will be altered back to its original state with front and back porches. Because the ground level has built up several inches on the property since the mid-nineteenth century, the house was raised up a foot so that it will look more as it did then.

Knowing what the original state of the house was requires quite a bit of architectural investigation. With the house down to the essential elements, Ruedrich made some interesting discoveries. For example, he was able to date the house with certainty by the screws used in two of the original doors.

“One clear indicator we have is handmade screws,” said Ruedrich. “Machine-made screws started being made in 1846 and were widely available right away. The handmade screws found in two doors push the date of the house back to between 1840 and 1845.”

Other elements of the original structure offer clues, for those who

know what to look for. Ghostmarks, as they’re called, where whitewash is or isn’t, indicate the placement of walls and doors. Nail holes in timbers indicate the width of boards. A cut in the floorboards proves the location of a staircase.

Ruedrich, a Louisburg, North Carolina resident who has worked on many house museums throughout North Carolina, recently spent two years working at Windsor’s Hope Plantation. He estimates that restoration of the whole building will take his crew all summer and possibly into the fall.

When restored, the house will look much like it did in the mid-nineteenth century. It will be sparse, the upstairs walls unpainted, the exterior unpainted, but that is how people lived on the Outer Banks at the time. The homestead will include farm animals, such as sheep, ox and cows, plus a garden, a plow and other trappings of nineteenth-century life.

“We want to interpret life in the nineteenth century,” said Parker.

More than 100 descendants originating from the Etheridge Homeplace are now living on the Island. The Etheridges were among the first European settlers here after the attempted English settlements in the 1500s.

OBC plans to open the house to the public when restoration is complete. Parker estimates it will take at least three years to complete the research, archaeology, design and furnishing, though the body of the main house should be restored by the winter of 2002. When it is finally opened to the public, the house will be furnished with nineteenth-century furniture and interpreters will be on site.

Parker estimated the cost of restoring the building at \$150,000, which is funded by OBC and donations.



2001 a Big Year for Corolla Wild Horse Fund

With the opening of its own office and the hiring of two co-directors, the Corolla Wild Horse Fund (CWHF) has made galloping strides forward this year.

The group has applied for nonprofit status and will incorporate to become its own entity. It is currently still operating under Outer Banks Conservationists. Nonprofit status will allow CWHF to receive grants and monies from other organizations to further the services they provide. CWHF has filed an application with the Donner Foundation for a \$40,000 grant, which would greatly help with operational expenses.

There are currently about 50 horses on the Outer Banks, plus 10 on Dews Island and about 10 over the state border in Virginia.

The horses are an isolated species. Though the horses have Spanish origins they are of a breed all their own due to their isolation on the Outer Banks for nearly 400 years. They are recognized by the state of North Carolina as a significant cultural and historical resource. It is the responsibility of CWHF in cooperation with others to manage this herd, and in doing so to prevent their access into

developed areas, to count and evaluate the health of the herd, to relocate wandering horses back to safe grounds, and to protect their pastureland, among many other duties.

New Co-Directors

Leading the way for CWHF are new part-time co-directors Gene and Donna Snow, who were hired in February to set up an



office and run the CWHF. The Snows live in Virginia Beach and make the almost three-hour trek to the Currituck Outer Banks several times a week. The Snows have been active members of Tidewater Western Riders for years, and their involvement with the Tidewater riding group has brought them into contact with the wild horses for the last four years.

Both Gene and Donna are retired from the Virginia Beach Police Department. They have owned or been involved

with horses all of their lives.

"This is a dream come true," said Gene. "We enjoy working with horses, and this is such a pleasant way to spend our retirement."

New Office

The new CWHF office is at the Currituck County Satellite Building at 1123 Ocean Trail in Corolla proper. The Snows are in the office two to three days a week, usually Monday, Wednesday and/or Friday from 10 a.m. until around 1:30 p.m., and they're often out in the field. The office phone number is 453-8002, and there is an answering machine. The mailing address is P.O. Box 361, Corolla, NC 27927. E-mail address is info@corollawildhorses.com.

All in a Day's Work

Mending fences, re-routing rogue horses, counting horses, paperwork and setting up the office are what the Snows do in their on-duty days. The Snows have been busy repairing and replacing fences at the beach access and also putting up fences at Dews Island. They're also trying to obtain passes so that they can have access to the federal property north of Corolla. In the Swan Beach and Carova area, the Snows recently located three herds, about 25 horses.





They've also repainted the Wild Horse Sanctuary Sign and trimmed the trees and shrubs around it so that visitors can see it better when entering Corolla. In the future, they hope to light the sign.

New Foals at Dews Island

Two new foals were born at Dews Island this spring. A chestnut filly was born in April, and a sorrel colt, the son of Red Man, was born in May. The two foals make 10 horses at Dews Island. The herd at Dews Island consists of horses that were classified as rogue horses because they constantly escaped the fences and made their way into Corolla village, where traffic and other dangers awaited them. CWHF transferred the herd to the island, where they have 400 acres of safe grazing space.

Census, Identification and Health Evaluation Plans

CWHF is planning a census and identification marking of all the horses in the herd for sometime in the fall before hunting season and after the snakes have gone, said Gene. The Snows and many volunteers will corral the horses and mark them with a freeze-branded number and also insert a small microchip under the skin, which will allow the horse to be claimed should it ever be lost or taken. While the horses are contained, blood samples will also be taken to determine the health of the herd. Volunteers will also collect horse droppings to analyze them for parasites. Another option being considered in the census and identification plan is a tracking chip that can be ingested. Gene said that they are considering capturing the lead stallion in each group of horses and giving him the chip so that they can track where he leads his herd from day to day.

Volunteers Needed

CWHF needs volunteers, especially with the census and health evaluation. Horse knowledge is welcomed but not required, as volunteers are trained. For more information about the Wild Horse Fund call 453-8002 or visit us on the web at www.corollawildhorses.com. 



Lighting the Way for 125 Years

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Grace, and everyone sang as the light was illuminated at dusk, as it has been every day for 125 years. A reception in the Keepers' House wrapped up the day.

Throughout the day, tours of the decorated lighthouse and the Keepers' House, a rare treat for the public, were free. Talks were given hourly on the history of the lighthouse, and commemorative T-shirts and sweatshirts were sold. The highlight of the day was the special pictorial cancellation of stamped mail at a temporary post office set up inside the Keepers' House by Corolla postmaster, Linda Lewis. Visitors brought stamped Christmas cards and other envelopes for a specially designed lighthouse cancellation. Cancelled envelopes are still available through Outer Banks Conservationists for \$3 each or two for \$5.

The event was just wonderful, said Shirley Austin, whose husband, Gene, was the last government lightkeeper. "Just the fact that it was finally celebrated made it special."

Through all the years, this was the only anniversary that has ever been marked with formal celebration. The 100th anniversary did not go by unnoticed, but there was certainly much less pomp. In 1975, the Currituck Historical Society just happened to be having a meeting on December 1, so they lit a candle and said a toast, "Here's to the

Currituck Lighthouse." Shirley Austin said she and several other locals got together that year and had a picnic, not on the official date but in the summer, just to make sure that somebody celebrated the occasion.

At the time of the 100th anniversary, the lighthouse outbuildings and grounds had fallen into disrepair, though the light was still maintained by the Coast Guard and lightkeeper Gene Austin. At this anniversary, however, the Currituck Beach Lighthouse and its buildings stood proudly, free of vines and overgrowth, beautifully restored and receiving guests in a gallant manner. A celebration was in order.

Currituck Beach Lighthouse Facts:

- ✿ The Currituck Beach Lighthouse was the third and final first-order lightstation constructed on the Outer Banks.
- ✿ Construction begun: June 19, 1874.
- ✿ First illumination: December 1, 1875.
- ✿ Location: 34 miles S of Cape Henry (Virginia) Lighthouse; 32.5 miles NNW of Bodie Island Lighthouse.
- ✿ Cost to build: \$178,000.
- ✿ Height: to focal plane of lens, 158'.



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Although the master key opens the most important doors, the other keys are truly essential to the life of a modern-day keeper in charge of the three-acre oasis in a sea of sprawling coastal development.

Managing the site includes oversight of all the buildings, inside and out, including hiring contractors to continue the restoration of the keepers' houses and brick walkways and to preserve and maintain the integrity of the tower. The job also entails discovering sources for historic hardware, supervising the landscaping and replacing equipment damaged by a lightning strike. And that's just the beginning!

During the season (Easter through Thanksgiving, more or less) staff is needed to handle the crowds of tourists who visit the site. Over 100,000 people climb the Currituck Beach Lighthouse every year, and probably two or three times that number visit the compound to gaze at the majestic tower and restored double Keepers' House, enjoy the beautiful grounds and practice some "retail therapy" in our wonderful Museum Shop. A minimum of six people, (each of whom need their own set of keys,) is needed to share the two nine-hour shifts each day, seven days a week, and one four-hour shift on weekdays. Staff not only must be hired, but also trained, supervised and paid on time. Juggling the schedule to be fair to all and accommodate the needs of second jobs, guests, and dental appointments is another daunting task for the keeper keyed to the computer!

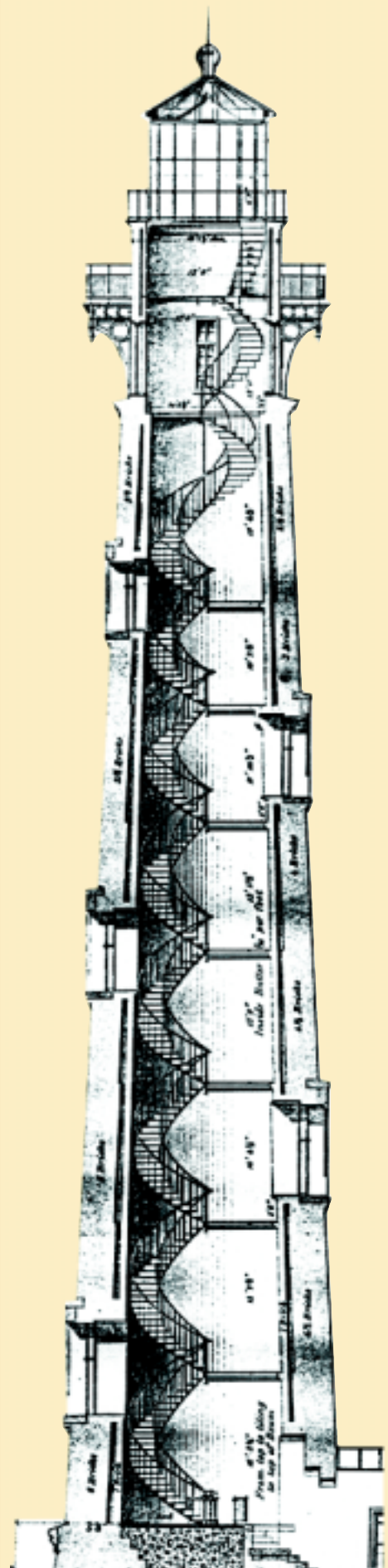
One of my favorite responsibilities as a keeper is using my keys to show off special features of the lighthouse to special visitors such as Helen and Allen Gademsky of

Cincinnati, Ohio. Last week, the husband and wife team, who are compiling information on the still-existing classic Fresnel lighthouse lenses in the United States and Canada, were enthralled by our first order lens manufactured by Sautter, Lemonnier et Cie of Paris, France. In exchange for a chance to study the lens, they offered me the name of a resource for the possible restoration of our revolving mechanism, originally powered by a clockwork mechanism that included a 270-pound weight suspended from a cable over a sand pit in the base of the lighthouse.

From 1875 until 1939, when the U.S. Coast Guard took over the lighthouse and automated the light, the keeper on duty had to wind up the mechanism every two and a quarter hours from a set of gears at the top of the lighthouse, just below the lens.

While they were measuring the thickness of the lens, I told the Gademskys about the lightning strike on the tower last year, damaging the cameras and monitor of the lookout system used by the staff to help control the number of people on the gallery deck. Thanks to our computer access to weather radar, the staff had time to get all the climbers out of the tower before the storm hit. But despite our efforts to disconnect electrical systems, the staff watched a transformer fly across the office at the base of the tower.

The key to the lock on the gate in front of the Keepers' House is used to allow access to that part of the compound for weddings and other special events. Last weekend a wedding reception for 150 people was held on the grounds. Several tents were erected, food brought in, and nicely decorated tables were arranged for the guests. Several






dozen weddings and other events are held on the grounds each year. The contract spells out the area used for such occasions, along with the fees and regulations, specified by the keeper. Fortunately for the wedding party, mosquito machines strategically placed on the grounds eliminated nasty bites from mosquitoes and no-seeums.

In the next issue of our newsletter the Keeper's Log will contain more information about the duties of a modern-day lighthouse keeper, including public relations, budgets and merchandising.

We welcome your comments and suggestions for improvements. I'd like to close this column with a journal entry written by Nathan Hooker Swain, Keeper of Currituck Beach Lighthouse from 1905 through 1920:

“May God help us to go forth in the performance of our duties in keeping this journal as we have in the past. May this be closed in coming years with honor to the Keepers and to the Station.” 

N. H. Swain, Keeper This January 1, 1914

Become a Lighthouse Keeper

Outer Banks Conservationists has immediate openings for the positions of Assistant and Principal Lighthouse Keepers, as well Lighthouse Inspectors and Superintendents. OK, so they're not paid positions that will allow you to quit your job and work in Corolla. They're sponsorships, which will put you in the position of helping Outer Banks Conservationists with major accomplishments at the Currituck Beach Lighthouse.

Sponsors are not a new concept for the Currituck Beach Lighthouse. With help from sponsorship funding since 1991, Outer Banks Conservationists have held a reunion of the lighthouse descendants, restored the ironwork at the top of the lighthouse tower, installed shutters and historic hardware on the lighthouse and Museum Shop, celebrated the 125th anniversary of the first illumination, and continued to restore the Keepers' Residence.

What's new are four additional sponsorship categories, ranging from \$10 to \$5,000 or more, with increased benefits. Here's how it works: Individuals can join for \$10 or families can join for \$25. For a sponsorship of \$100, you become an Assistant Keeper, for \$500 a Principal Keeper, for \$1,000 a Lighthouse Inspector, and for \$5,000 a Lighthouse Superintendent.

The benefits of sponsoring are many, beyond knowing that you're helping preserve a historic landmark

(and receiving a tax deduction). All sponsorships include free visits to the lighthouse, a copy of the annual newsletter and a sponsorship decal. Each sponsor will receive a sponsorship card designating the number of free visits that are included with their level of sponsorship. Family sponsors will receive a pictorial envelope commemorating the 125th anniversary of the illumination. Assistant Keepers will receive a lighthouse T-shirt, and Principal Keepers will receive a lighthouse golf shirt. Inspectors will receive a lighthouse windbreaker, and Lighthouse Superintendents will receive a matted copy of the front elevation of the Keepers' House, dated 1875. Principal Keepers, Inspectors and Superintendents will be eligible to schedule



William James Tate,
keeper from 1937-1940

a tour of the lighthouse compound with official Light Keeper Lloyd Childers from April 1 to May 15 or September 15 to October 30. A sponsorship application is included in this newsletter.

Your contributions will help Outer Banks Conservationists continue to make improvements to the grounds and Keepers' House and install new exhibits in the lighthouse tower. OBC also plans to restore the revolving mechanism in the lighthouse tower so that climbers can see first hand the operation of the original lighting system.

Join our efforts to preserve one of the last intact first-order lighthouse compounds on the East Coast. Be a Lighthouse Keeper. Keep Currituck Beach Lighthouse *standing tall and shining bright!*



For more details see "Become a Lighthouse Keeper" on page 7.

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

☐ Lighthouse Superintendent \$5000

☐ Lighthouse Inspector \$1000

☐ Principal Keeper \$500

☐ Assistant Keeper \$100

☐ Family \$25

☐ Individual \$10

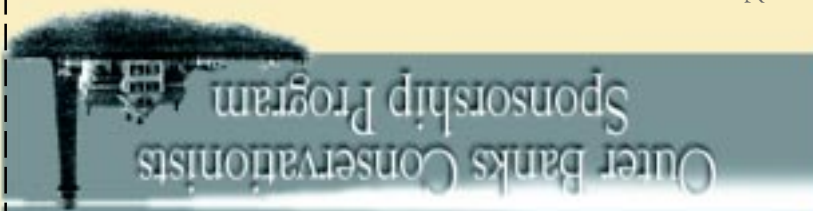
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Celebrating 125 Years of Service
1875-2000



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for Corolla
Wild Horse Fund*

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