

The House of Adam

By BARBARA WOLTER

Etheridge homeplace saved

In 1783, when the old Etheridge homeplace was built on the north end of Roanoke Island, the family owned the land from the Croatan Sound to the Roanoke Sound.

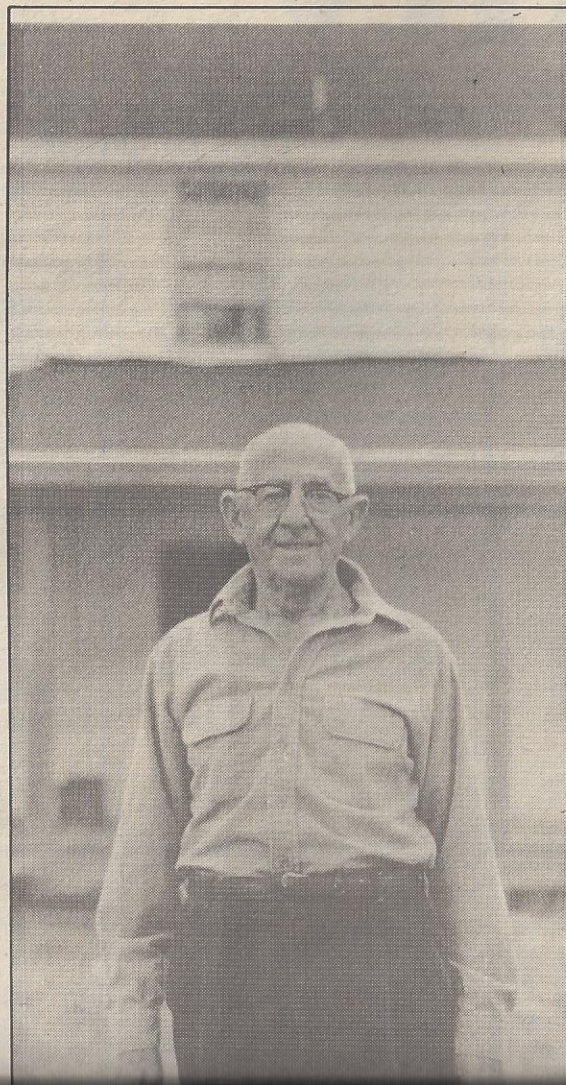
In those days, Roanoke Island was a part of Currituck County. A large fire destroyed many records, including deeds of land ownership.

But according to family records and oral history, a man named Adam Etheridge built the house that is now the oldest house standing on Roanoke Island.

Six generations later, old-timers still remember stories about the patriarch called "mortal Adam," rumored to be the first Etheridge on Roanoke Island.

The old two-story white house, located off of U.S. 64/264 on the north end of Roanoke Island near Etheridge Road, has weathered 205 years and five generations of Etheridges.

Three years ago the Etheridge homeplace was sold to a developer who plans to construct a large condominium project on the land.



The majestic old two-story home was mentioned in an August 1940 edition of *Progressive Farmer*.

In the article, Augustus Holly Etheridge wrote about his 50 years of marriage to Roxie Etheridge and their life in the old homestead.

"After the ceremony that Sunday night we returned to the home we still occupy. . . ." he wrote. "On Jan. 15, 1938, we celebrated our Golden Wedding anniversary at the same home."

Augustus Holly Etheridge, known as "Uncle Gus," was a member of the General Assembly and a Dare County Sheriff.

The only piece of furniture left in the old house was the desk where "Uncle Gus" kept his General Assembly papers, Wilson said.

In a letter, "Uncle Gus" spoke of Aunt Crissy, the former slave girl who stayed on with the family after the abolition.

He described his bride's wedding dress and her faithfulness over the years.

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For the first time in more than a century, the old homeplace was in the hands of someone other than an Etheridge.

A group of decedents disapproved of the sale of the home and convinced the developer to sell them the structure and the 1/2 acre of land on which it sits.

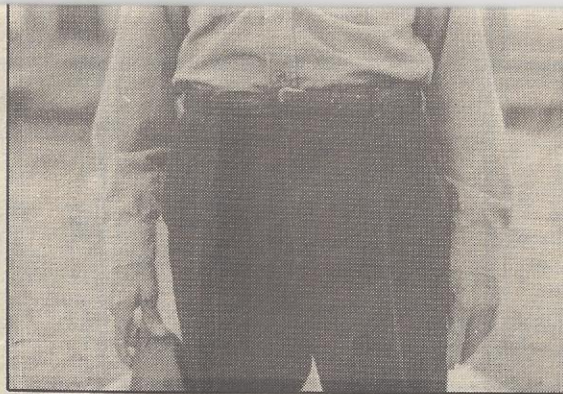
John F. Wilson IV, a sixth generation Etheridge, and Lee, Natalie and Lou Salet, fifth generation Etheridges, purchased the land and are now in the midst of preserving the old family homestead.

Wilson, mayor pro tem of Manteo, is an architect and avid historian with a number of major historical preservation projects under his belt.

He headed up the restoration of the Currituck Lightkeeper's House and the old Jones' homeplace on Fernando Street in Manteo where he now lives.

"This is the only house I've ever seen built with mortice and tenon," Wilson said.

The corners of the house are 4-by-4 planks that stretch from the floor to the rafters. To support the floorboards, a hole is cut in the planks and the floor board is run through and stabilized with wooden pegs.



ADAM ETHERIDGE IV, the last in the line of Adam Etheridges, stands in front of the old Etheridge Homeplace, built by the first Adam Etheridge.

The front portion of the house is the original section, built entirely with wooden pegs. The back section of the house can be dated from around the 1860s by the large square-cut steel nails.

In all three local restoration projects, including the most recent Etheridge homestead, Wilson has contracted Calvin Gibbs, a Manteo carpenter whom Wilson describes as "a young carpenter with the skills of the old masters."

This week Gibbs and others removed the old front porch, and constructed a replacement porch to mirror the old dilapidated one.

Although it is fashioned in the style of the old porch, modern day nails hold it together.

Shingles were taken from the old porch and used to patch spots on the rest of the roof.

The house is now stabilized, and the group is working towards its eventual restoration.

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"It has been aptly said that 'with history comes the idea of toil and strife, defeat and victory,'" Etheridge wrote.

And the old homeplace has seen its share of each.

Oral history has it that at one time the Etheridge clan owned more than 100 acres on the north end. One deed indicated that an Etheridge owned 50 acres from sound to sound that was referred to as Black Hall Plantation.

Tradition also has it that the legendary Aunt Crissy lived out her days in a home the family built for her under an old oak tree near the homeplace.

Today, the old oak still stands in what is now Scarborough Square Mobile Home Park off of Etheridge Road.

The area around the tree was preserved and a playground sits underneath its ancient branches.

Like the roots of the tree, the roots of the Etheridge clan are deeply imbedded in Dare County history.

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Adam Etheridge III is remembered as one of the five who helped Orville and Wilbur Wright push off the famed first flight.

Generations of Adam Etheridges have lived in and around the old homeplace.

Adam Etheridge IV, the last in the line of Adam Etheridges, turned 80 this year and welcomes the restoration of the old homeplace. "It's important to remember where you came from," he said. "I'm glad to see it saved."



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