

Welcome to another edition of Village Craftsmen's on-line newsletter!

For those of you who missed last month's posting you might want to see some of our [January snow pictures](#). As beautiful as it was, it didn't last long. In a few days the weather turned mild again and the melting snow left only fond memories. Ocracokers were quick to return to their regular winter-time routines.

This January Amy Howard organized a revival of one of our newer island traditions, the community auction.



It was designed primarily for local residents, not only as a form of ultimate recycling, but also as an opportunity to visit with neighbors, catch up on local news,....and raise money for some good causes.



For weeks she collected boxes and pickup truck loads of assorted knick-knacks, kitchen items, appliances, furniture, clothes, toys, tools, and clothes. On Saturday, January 26 the Community Center was overflowing with merchandise and people. A preview was organized for the morning hours, and sandwiches, drinks, and desserts were sold. The bidding started



at 2 pm and lasted past dinner time.

When the final tally was done, over \$3,600.00 was made and donated to the Ocracoke Fire Department, Ocracoke Preservation Society, and Ocracoke Girl Scouts.

But a community auction is only a once-a-year event. What else keeps us busy during the cold and dark days of winter? Every summer, one of the most common questions visitors ask of us locals is "What do you do during the off-season?"

There are many advantages to living on this beautiful strip of sand. One of them is getting to know all of the other talented and interesting folks who call Ocracoke home. And often it includes fun times and mini-adventures. This winter I had the good fortune to accompany Captain Rob Temple of the [Schooner Windfall](#) on his annual trip down the Intracoastal Waterway to his winter headquarters in Flamingo Florida. Rob was kind enough to make room for me, and to chronicle the trip. I share his account with you below.

A DESCENDENT OF BLACKBEARD'S QUARTERMASTER RETURNS TO THE LOW SEAS by  
Captain Rob Temple



Every November when the tourists have mostly gone and the scent of wood smoke fills the air, I fill the Windfall with erstwhile pirates and point the bowsprit toward South Florida. Without any womenfolk aboard to keep us in line we have a tendency to resemble pirates in some ways — eating and drinking stuff that ain't good for us, lots of political incorrectness and off-color humor, not much bathing or shaving. What follows is a brief account of what it was like to have Philip Howard aboard for the most recent trip south.

Aaahrrr — Philip Howard. No sooner had he stepped aboard me schooner in Savannah than his pirate ancestry began to show through. He stood his trick at the helm with a steady hand and a roving eye — always on the lookout for a prize (perhaps no more than a glimpse of a scantily-clad lass on a passing vessel but the instinct was there all the same).

Although Philip had often talked about making the annual voyage south on the schooner Windfall, his innate lust for gold had always kept him firmly rooted to his cash register at the Village Craftsmen. Once a couple of years ago he'd managed to pry himself loose long enough to join the passage from Ocracoke to Savannah, but since that time, although he'd continued to show interest in future voyages, he always backed off from specific departure dates until I finally stopped mentioning the matter to him.

I was therefore surprised and pleased to receive a message shortly after departing Ocracoke last fall that Philip wished to join the cruise at Savannah. Aboard at the time were only myself and me old swashbuckling quartermaster Jim Tomkins, a semi-retired shipwright from the Buffalo area. This was good since Tomkins and Philip had been shipmates on Philip's earlier voyage and had proven compatible in their liberal political leanings. I was somewhat relieved that me old shipmate Bob Geh was not along on this passage as he tends

to inhabit the other end of the political spectrum — out there with Jesse Helms and Attila the Hun — and there'd have been little sleep for me with the constant dueling on deck.



Due to a late-season hurricane offshore (Olga) which, while posing no direct threat to land was generating large swells and breakers around inlets, I followed ye old “chicken o’ the sea” approach and plotted me course down the Intracoastal Waterway. There wasn’t much sailing to be done on this route. There’s mostly motoring at six knots waiting for drawbridges and watching birds. Each time I make this trip I’m shocked and distressed anew at the revolting development along the waterway. One mile-long stretch of shoreline on Edisto Island where I once counted five bald eagles was recently clear-cut and was being bulldozed for a golf course. Looks like today’s pirates are plundering not the sea but the land.

Our first day out of Savannah was spent winding through the Georgia salt marsh — a beautiful part of the world so long as you’re not in a hurry. The waterway in these parts twists and turns like a drunken eel and quite often the compass will show that we’re actually heading northeast or northwest as we work our way gradually southward.

After two days of this we fetched up at Fernandina, Florida where Tomkins’s skilled Irish nose sniffed out an authentic pub for dinner. We all feasted on shepherd’s pie washed down with mugs of draft stout. Aaaahhrr!

Irish joke: Q: What’s Irish and sits in the back yard?

A: Patty O’Furniture.

The next day we stopped at St. Augustine. Concern was mounting about Philip. While he was doing as well as any of us in developing the pirate skills of overeating, oversleeping, lounging on deck and spinning yarns, he repeatedly failed to consume his fair share of the daily grog ration. We considered making him walk the plank, but just as Governor Spotswood had done with his ancestor in 1718, we granted him a reprieve and in St. Augustine we introduced him to some of Florida’s finest taverns to catch up on some shoreside drinking practice.

The next evening found us at New Smyrna Beach where we went to dinner with me old shipmate Bill Maden and his wife Pat. The fried shellfish and beer made a memorable impression on the skipper in the form of a major gout attack that had me gimping around the deck like Long John Silver himself for the rest of the voyage.

Below New Smyrna, the waterway offers good sailing down the Indian River and we gave the engine a rest for most of the day as we barreled along under a full press of canvass all the way to Melbourne where Jim's son J.T. joined our crew. Finding himself the junior member at 46, J.T. didn't seem to know what to make of us old geezers at first but it didn't take him long to adapt. The next day offered more good sailing down to Peck Lake, a serene anchorage surrounded by mangroves where we dinghied ashore and took a walk on the beach.

The morning we left Peck Lake we began a two-day ordeal of motoring through South Florida's most densely populated stretch from Palm Beach through Miami. We had to pass through twenty drawbridges each day, most of which only opened at half-hour intervals which required a lot of waiting. By the end of the second day we had emerged from the sprawl of canalside mansions with screened swimming pools and manicured lawns and anchored at Cape Florida State Park on Key Biscayne. Ahead of us lay a day and a half of smooth sailing through the clear blue-green waters of the Florida Keys. As we raced along before a fresh northerly breeze, the vessel functioned like a true pirate ship. Every man knew his duty and performed it with little discussion.



A few miles out of Flamingo a pod of dolphins met us and escorted us to the channel entrance as they have every year as far back as I can remember. After docking up at Windfall's winter berth, we swabbed the decks and generally tried to make the vessel look as little as possible like pirates had been aboard for the past two weeks.

As for Philip: all in all he made definite strides toward getting in touch with his pirate roots, but it may take him another voyage to earn his full approval rating of "aaahrrrr."



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Next time you visit the island, be sure to scout out the [Schooner Windfall](#) and consider spending part of a relaxing afternoon or evening enjoying a unique view of Ocracoke from aboard a traditional schooner, sailing in Blackbeard's wake. I think you'll be glad you did!

Hoping to see you all before too many more months pass.

Philip and crew at Village Craftsmen