

Fall Greetings from Ocracoke Island!

Perhaps it is because Ocracoke is so isolated, accessible only by boat or small plane, that throughout the summer months one of the questions visitors most frequently ask is “What do you do here all winter?” As the season winds down local folks have more time to relax; to get together with neighbors, family and friends; and to just visit. A frequent topic of conversation in the off season is “funny and off-the-wall questions & comments from summer visitors.”

Of course, we all know that anyone (including us) in new surroundings is often rightly befuddled and confused. Nevertheless, we can't help but be amused sometimes.

For most of the 33 years I have been in business on Ocracoke I have repeated the same refrain: “I wish I'd been preserving all of these comments, questions, and interactions over the years. I could write a book.” Unfortunately I have forgotten most of them. But a few gems (and the responses, from various, and sometimes impish, business owners) stand out in my memory, and I herewith share some of them with you.

- [Standing on the Community Store Dock] “Where do we get the ferry that goes to that island over there where the lighthouse is?”

Ocracoke Lighthouse:



- “Excuse me,” [as customer is walking out the front door] “which way should I go?”

“Where are you trying to get to?”

“It doesn't matter.”

“Well, then, I guess it doesn't much matter which way you go.”

- “Has that tree always been there?”
 - “Is that a local cemetery across the street?”

Schooner Windfall:



- [To the first mate on the Schooner Windfall] “How many sunset trips do you make each day?”

[Answer] “How many would you be willing to pay for?”

- [Visitors to Ocracoke frequently mispronounce the name of the island. “Okakoke,” “Oracoke,” & “Okachoke” are common. One gentleman, trying to be sensitive, approached one of the clerks at the Variety Store.]

“How do you pronounce the name of this place,” he asked.

The response: “The Va-rye-eh-tee Store.”

- The Village Craftsmen sells kaleidoscopes and teleidoscopes. The latter have no moving parts (no shards of colored glass, no glitter suspended in oil, no turning wheels). There is a clear glass ball in the end which captures light from different objects in the room, and internal mirrors which divide the images and then project them into the eyepiece as kaleidoscopic patterns. To get the full effect, it is necessary to look at various objects around the room and watch the patterns change.

Misunderstanding the way they work, customers will often hold a teleidoscope up to their eye and look straight ahead, turning it after the fashion of a traditional kaleidoscope.

I was walking through the shop one afternoon when I spied a customer missing the full impact of the teleidoscope. “Just look at some different things,” I suggested, helpfully.

“Oh, OK,” she responded meekly, and then carefully placed the teleidoscope back on the shelf.

- “Is there a real beach on this island? You know, one with a boardwalk.”

Ocracoke Beach:



- “We went to the lighthouse, but it wasn’t there.”
- “I notice this is a one-way street. Does it come out somewhere on that end?”
[Suggested answer: “No, there is a huge parking lot at the end filled with rusting vehicles from {insert name of least favorite state here}.”]

Howard Street:



- [At the Ocracoke Post Office] “Can you tell me where I can buy stamps?”
- “What time does the 4 o’clock ferry leave?”
- “Oh, we didn’t take a ferry. We drove.”

In a few days the Community Center will be the gathering place for the first ever “Howard Family of Ocracoke Reunion.” Teresa Howard Harrell, of Tarboro, NC, and great-great-great-great-great granddaughter of William Howard of Ocracoke has organized the event. Based on advance registrations, there will be upwards of 150 people attending from as far away as Wyoming and California.

A number of activities have been planned, including entertainment by local musicians Martin Garrish & Friends, a traditional Ocracoke square dance, storytelling, and a family picnic. Julia Howard is preparing a wall-mount family tree with plenty of extra space for folks to pencil in details of their own branch of the family. We are looking forward to expanding our understanding of the history of the Howards of Ocracoke, as well as meeting many of the descendants of Ocracokers who ventured to other parts of the country in years past.

I will include a full report of the reunion in a future newsletter.

Until next time, all the best to you from,

Philip and the gang at Village Craftsmen