

by Ellen Fulcher Cloud, from her book, *Ocracoke Lighthouse*, 1993, Chapter 6.

The Ocracoke Lighthouse and the structures within the compound were on the National Register of Historical Places long before the Village of Ocracoke became an Historical District. Approximately thirty-two thousand people visit this historical station annually. It is owned by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), which is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the lighthouse. The keeper's quarters are used by the National Park Service, which has the responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep in accordance with the terms of a written agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard. In 1987 the National Park Service (NPS) determined that the keeper's quarters needed major rehabilitation, and by 1990 had expended \$278,000 to rehabilitate the interior of the structure.

During this time several inspections were made of the lighthouse and it was found in need of immediate preservation work to stabilize its deteriorating condition. As a result of a Bicentennial Lighthouse Grant of seventeen thousand dollars, the NPS initiated an "Historic Structures Report" to assess the structure's condition, document historic fabric, and develop a scope of work.

Near the Lighthouse is a small generator house, which holds the generator that keeps the lighthouse in operation when there is a power outage. Because Ocracoke gets its power from Virginia, the island is often with electricity; if anything happens anywhere down the line, we who are at the end of the line lose power. The lighthouse has continued to glow with or without power for 165 years until 1988, when the tired, worn out generator ceased to work. The U.S. Coast Guard decided not to replace it, as it would be less costly to install battery driven navigational lights on the hand rails that encircled the lamp of the tower. This was done by drilling holes through the structure base, through which cables could be run that would operate the lights by batteries. Not only was it unsightly, it added seriously to the weakening of the structure.

The presence of the light from Ocracoke Lighthouse had given the residents of Ocracoke, as well as captains of ships off shore, a feeling of security that even we were unaware of until the first power outage. None of us realized that, when an outage occurred, our first reaction was to immediately look in the direction of the lighthouse. A feeling of desertion and insecurity must have swept the island, for the power outage was a topic of the next day's conversation. The two small battery operated lights that had been installed on the rail were on and the lighthouse was in darkness. The sight was viewed with anger and disbelief.

In February of 1989 a contract was put in operation to paint the lighthouse and repair the windows and door. The old wood-clad windows were removed and vinyl Anderson windows

with snap-in muntins (which are in violation of the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for historic structures) were installed.

Upon learning of this, I contacted two friends, who joined me, and promptly took action, demanding that the contractor cease work. The contractor disregarded our demands, but we were able to make a quick inspection of the work being done.

Not only were the windows a violation by style and material, but they were not large enough for opening in the structure! The openings had been framed up with 4×4 material to make the windows adaptable. Inquiring about the old windows, we learned that they were to be sent to Portsmouth, Virginia, to be destroyed and were at this time inside the ground level of the lighthouse.

We left the premises in order to make some phone calls and inform the proper authorities. We talked to the U.S. Coast Guard, National Park Service, State Historical Preservation Society, and Congressman Walter P. Jones office. All agreed that these acts were in violation of Section 106 of the National Historical Preservation Act of 1966.

In one of those phone calls, I was made aware of a letter dated May 27, 1987, two years prior, from the Department of Cultural Resources in Raleigh, North Carolina, to the United States Coast Guard in Portsmouth, Virginia, part of which follows:

“We seriously question the need to replace all windows and frames as specified in Section 8G. Our photographs of Ocracoke Lighthouse indicate that the existing wood windows and frames are in fair-to-good condition. The total replacement of all window frames and sash with the new vinyl-clad or aluminum-clad units with snap-in muntins would be in violation of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for use in either the door or windows of the Ocracoke Lighthouse.



“We recommend that each existing window frame and sash be carefully inspected for its condition. Any deteriorated elements of the window frames, such as sills, stops, jams, and lintels should be repaired or replaced to match the existing detailing. All sash which are in sound condition should be repaired and glazed as needed. Frames or sash which are too deteriorated to be repaired should be replaced with new frames or sash which have been milled or fabricated to match the existing ones. Any new replacement sash should be of true six-light construction, and identical to the existing sash. Snap-in muntins are not acceptable.”

Realizing that the workmen at the lighthouse at that very moment were in direct violation of all official instructions for the project and that we had confirmation of this fact, we returned to the lighthouse to inspect the windows which had been removed from the structure. Upon arrival we found the door of the lighthouse had been secured by twisting wire around the latch. With much protest from the contractor, we opened the door and found the windows to be in excellent condition. We proceeded to take the windows to our vehicle in order to hold them for safe keeping, ignoring the demands of the contractor to put them back.

Realizing, as we drove off, the seriousness of removing federal property without permission, we decided to call all authorities, both state and federal, to inform them of our act and demand they take action at once to render support and cease the destruction of this historical structure.

By late afternoon a meeting had been arranged for the following Wednesday with the National Park Service, our Hyde County Commissioner, and several U.S.C.G. Officers, including Commander Malrose and Lt. McCaffrey, both of Cleveland Ohio, who had the contract with the civilian contractor. I had several conversations earlier in the day with

Malrose or McCaffrey. I felt they were neither cooperative nor courteous; on two occasions they refused to take my calls.

At the meeting, Commander Malrose and Lt. McCaffrey, who had flown in from Cleveland, heard our complaints and were informed of the seriousness of disregarding the regulations for compliance with Section 106 of the Advisory Council. This law was clearly explained by a specialist on restoration of historical structures at this meeting.

After hearing our complaints, Commander Malrose agreed to have windows milled like the old ones to replace the vinyl ones and to purchase a generator and remove the lights on the rail.

In April of the following year, after seeing no activity that would make the situation right, I called Commander Malrose, who denied making such agreements. He said he planned to do nothing until the summer of 1990. He was told that we wanted the lights removed before August 7<sup>th</sup>, which had been designated as National lighthouse Day, and that we could live with the windows until after that date. His reply was short and to the point, saying; "I wish you luck. I have no plans for the near future to do any of this work."

I called Congressman Jone's office, and talked with Mr. Floyd Lupton, who said he would get right on it. At 5:30pm Mr. Lupton called me back to inform me that a generator would be purchased and shipped that day. The battery-operated lights would be off before August 7<sup>th</sup>. He stated that the windows would take longer because they had to be milled.

As promised by Congressman Jone's office, the generator was replace and the lights removed from the rail, though not in time for the August 7<sup>th</sup> celebration, for the generator house had to be restored. The old original windows have now been reworked and are back in place within the structure. The National Park service is to be given credit for this, for it was their restoration department that restored the windows, but I must add that the United States Coast Guard paid the bill.

This act was a startling realization of the importance of getting the lighthouse place under the control of the National Park Service. Several contacts have been made in an attempt to achieve this goal. The Coast Guard is anxious to transfer the structure to the National Park, but they must retain ownership of the light or lens at the top, since all aids to navigation are their responsibility. The National Park wants the ownership of the structure but must wait and go through all the government red tape necessary for such a transfer.

I in no way mean to criticize the U.S. Coast Guard, for they play a most important part in the

lives of all the Bankers. They risk their lives every day in order to save others. Most of the male population of Ocracoke has served in or been a part of the Coast Guard or Life Saving Service, or in some way been helped by the service. It is a branch of the military service that we hold in great admiration and pride.

The Coast Guard's responsibility is to save lives and not historical structures. It is for this reason we recommend the lighthouse be placed under the control of the National Park, whose main priority is the restoration of such structures.

As of this printing [1993] the U.S. Coast Guard and Cape Hatteras National Seashore are still negotiating the possible transfer of title of this, the oldest lighthouse on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.