



For nearly 30 years Ocracoke Preservation Society has been working to preserve island culture, documents, artifacts, stories, and historic properties. The economic recession of the last few years has impacted Ocracoke and the Preservation Society. In early 2011 the executive committee began new fund raising programs to help ensure that OPS continues its mission. You can help by making a donation today. Every contribution, small or large, will go towards preserving our unique island heritage. [To donate, please click here, or on the photo above.](#)

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The invitation read “You are cordially invited to a FREE CLAM CHOWDER SUPPER on Friday, March 25 [1983] at 6:30 p.m. in the Methodist Church Rec. Hall.”

There’s no question about it. Offer free clam chowder, especially the traditional Ocracoke variety prepared by Clinton Gaskill (1906-1999), Ocracoke native, commercial fisherman and popular cook, and be prepared for an enthusiastic response. About 50 people came out that night to formally organize what would become the Ocracoke Preservation Society.

Several weeks prior to that evening a handful of citizens, Anita Fletcher, Linda Scarborough, David and Sherrill Senseney, and Philip and Julia Howard met in the Senseney’s living room to talk about forming an organization to preserve our island’s rich and colorful heritage.

Since the establishment of a World War II Navy base on the island, and the rapid changes following the war, particularly the construction of a hard surface road from the village to

Hatteras Inlet, and the institution of state operated ferries across the inlet, many of the defining characteristics of Ocracoke seemed threatened.

History and stories were in danger of being forgotten. There was no central location for the storage and preservation of significant historic documents (e.g. deeds, wills, and maps). Important and noteworthy artifacts were scattered among various families, many in far away places. And, perhaps most troubling, a number of classic island homes were being demolished to make room for modern motels and other businesses, as well as private residences.

The goals of those first few islanders were ambitious. And they knew they would need the help, cooperation, and energy of the entire community.

After dinner at the organizational meeting on March 25 the committee presented their proposed by-laws. As summarized in the society's first newsletter in April of 1983 "the purpose of the organization shall be to encourage, assist and participate in identification, preservation, and restoration of significant Ocracoke Island structures, buildings, districts, and objects of local interest; to facilitate and encourage public participation in preservation programs and activities; to purchase, accept, hold, and administer gifts of money, securities, and other property; [and] to operate as a non-profit organization...."

The original officers of the Ocracoke Preservation Society were:

- President, David Esham
- Vice President, Calvin O'Neal
- Secretary, Anita Fletcher
- Treasurer, Linda Scarborough
- Education Director, David Senseney
- Member at Large, Blanche Styron
- Publicity Director, Kay Riddick
- Trustees (who "shall meet with the Executive Committee to discuss and have equal vote in determining the acquisition of any real estate or building or any object with value of \$100 or more"), Ernest Cutler, Alex Eley, Elsie Garrish, Philip Howard, Ronald O'Neal, Jr., John Ivey Wells, Larry Williams, and Belle Willis.

Eager to get started, the executive committee met on March 29 to begin planning activities. The most popular idea at the general meeting was to create an Ocracoke Museum. Since this was not immediately possible, the committee decided to sponsor "Ocracoke History Days" on July 2, 3, & 4. Larry Williams was appointed to direct this activity, assisted by

Calvin O'Neal.

Larry and Calvin presented the following list of suggested exhibits to a meeting held on April 5:

- Coast Guard
- Shipwrecks and Ship Models
- Hurricanes and Weather
- Fishing and Hunting
- Quilting, Crocheting, Knitting, etc.
- World War I and World War II
- Maps, Deeds, and Wills
- Horse, Cattle, and Sheep Penning
- Miscellaneous Antiques
- Lectures and Slides
- Midwifery, Cures, and Ocracoke Medicines
- Music
- Church Happenings
- Early Travel and Hotels

With the help of dozens of residents an impressive array of artifacts, photographs, and documents were collected, organized, and made ready for display at Berkley Castle. For three days in July the Castle became a temporary museum visited by hundreds of islanders and visitors. It was such a success that a similar event was organized and held the following year.

In 1988 a developer purchased the historic David and Alice Wahab Williams house and property on the corner of NC Highway 12 and British Cemetery Road. When island residents learned of the plan to demolish the house in order to make room for a modern brick motel, members of the Preservation Society saw their opportunity to at least save an historic home and, at the same time, establish their long-hoped-for museum.

In negotiations with the National Park Service, the Preservation Society was successful in obtaining a long term lease on property near the Visitors Center and public docks. In 1989 the David and Alice Williams house was donated to the Society, moved to its present location and restored.

Moving the Capt. David & Alice Williams House:



This traditional two-story house was built by David Williams (1858-1938), the first Chief of the U.S. Coast Guard station in Ocracoke village, around the turn of the twentieth century. The property was purchased by David Williams for \$10.00 from William Howard Wahab, father of Captain Dave's wife, Alice Wahab (1865-1953). Alice's brother, James Hatton Wahab (1861-1913), served in the US Life Saving Service (the predecessor of the US Coast Guard) at Cedar Hammock, just north of Hatteras Inlet.

The David and Alice Williams house is a substantial four-square house with a deep hip roof, exterior chimneys, sawnwork eave brackets, and a hipped front porch with original boxed posts, sawnwork spandrels, two-over-two sashes, one-story rear ell with recessed porch, and a central hall floor plan. It is a contributing structure in the Ocracoke Historic District.

The OPS Museum, Gift Shop, & Library:

Soon after acquisition, the ground floor rooms of the Williams house were converted to the OPS museum which opened its doors to the public in June of 1992. The house and surrounding Ocracoke Historic District are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Three rooms on the ground floor are furnished in a fashion typical of island homes of the early twentieth century. The parlor includes an antique pump organ, easy chair, cast iron wood stove, and storage cabinets. This room is also used for rotating displays. At the time of this writing the parlor contains photographs, artifacts, and historical information about Muzel Bryant (1904-2008) and her family, the only multi-generational post-Civil War black family to call Ocracoke home.

An antique bed, often covered with a hand stitched quilt, is the focal point of the downstairs bedroom. A child's cradle, infant clothes, wash stand with pitcher and bowl, dresser, cabinets, portrait photographs, and various small artifacts provide a glimpse into island life

several generations ago.

The OPS Bedroom:



In the rear ell, the Williams house kitchen reminds visitors of daily life before Ocracoke had a municipal water system. A cast iron pitcher pump, at one time connected to the fresh water cistern, has a prominent place beside the porcelain sink. A three burner kerosene stove with removable oven and primitive toaster sits against one wall. An early refrigerator stands on the opposite wall. Shelves adorned with period kitchen utensils and other items round out the displays. Fragments of popular linoleum designs cover portions of the wooden floor.

The OPS Kitchen:



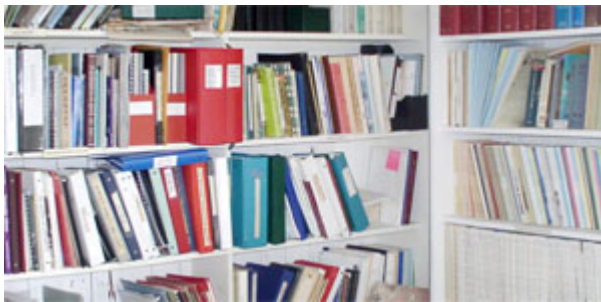
Other rooms and the hallway on the ground floor are used for rotating displays. These have included photography exhibits, maritime history exhibits, WWII displays, seashell and carved bird collections, and a video celebrating Ocracoke Island's unique brogue.

A small gift shop is housed in another downstairs room. There visitors can purchase numerous books documenting island history and culture, audio CDs of Ocracoke musicians, local cookbooks, art, prints, and note cards, as well as quilt squares and other items related to island life. The museum is open most of the year, 10 am - 4 pm (Monday through Friday), and 11 am - 4 pm (Saturday).

The second floor of the Williams house contains a research library and administrative offices. The research library has a growing number of historical, genealogical, photographic, and other resources relevant to Ocracoke history. Here you can find out how to square dance Ocracoke style, learn more about the island's historic 1823 lighthouse, British

Cemetery, wild ponies, hurricanes, and the World War II Naval Base on Ocracoke. You might even be able to track down your ancestors if you have island roots. The research library is not open to the general public, but these materials may be viewed by prior appointment.

The OPS Research Library:



The Ocracoke Preservation Society supports a number of special committees.

The Historic District Committee's mission is to preserve the area that has been officially identified as the Ocracoke Historic District by the United States Department of the Interior. This area was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990. It has state-wide significance in the areas of Exploration/Settlement and Social History as well as Architecture.

When placed on the National Register, Ocracoke village historic district contained 391 resources: 232 contributing buildings, 15 contributing cemeteries, four contributing structures (the lighthouse and three resource networks: the cisterns, the picket fences, and the docks), 139 non-contributing buildings, and one non-contributing structure (a pool cabana). The period of significance (1823-1959) extends from the earliest still existing resource (the lighthouse) to the year that Ocracoke entered the modern era. The district spreads across approximately 200 acres (roughly half of the total area) of the village and is mostly concentrated around Silver Lake Harbor.

The Ocracoke Preservation Society Historic District House Award Plaque has been awarded annually since 1989. A contributing structure in the Historic District is recognized for maintaining the architectural features that allowed the structure to be originally identified for placement in the Historic District.

The Society's annual Save an Old House Award has been given to the following individuals:

- Blanche Howard Jolliff, the Stacy Howard House, 1989
- John Thomas & Mildred O'Neal, the Ivey & Eliza O'Neal House, 1990
- James Barrie & Ellen Gaskill, Albert Styron's Store, 1991
- Keith & Isabella McDermott, the John Wilson McWilliams House, 1992
- Fannie Pearl Fulcher, the Amasa Fulcher House, 1993
- Jerry & Pam Sheets, the Horatio Jones Williams House, 1994
- Ruby Garrish, the Simpson-Basnett Garrish House, 1995
- Cape Hatteras National Park Service, the Ocracoke Lightkeeper's Quarters, 1996
- Andy & Mary Anderson, the Albert Styron House, 1997
- Myra Edwards Wahab, the James Hatton Wahab House, 1998
- Alton Ballance, the Isaac O'Neal House, 1999
- Timothy Midgett, the Bragg-Tolson House, 2000
- Isabella Morris, the Eliza & William I. O'Neal House, 2001
- William Nathan & Janet Spencer, the Esther & Andrew Spencer House, 2002
- Robert & Debbie Kornegay, the Preston & Bertha Garrish House, 2003
- Lynn Russell, the John N. Midgette House, 2004
- Philip Howard, the Bragg-Howard House, 2005
- Robert Temple & Sundae Horn, the William & Lillian Jackson House, 2006
- Michael & Paula Schramel, the James Henry Garrish House, 2007
- John R. Mitchell, Jr., the Tilman W. O'Neal House, 2008
- David Senseney (owner), James & Susan Paul (leasees), the Community Store, 2008
(Special award for restoration of public space inside & outside)
- David Senseney, the Sound Front Inn/Chase-Bragg-Boos House, 2009
- Tom & Carol Pahl, the Uriah Garrish House/Ocracoke Restoration Company, 2010

The Ocracoke Preservation Society also assists property owners in preserving land and historic buildings to protect Ocracoke's natural resources and areas that have historic, cultural and recreational importance.

OPS offers the following preservation options to interested landowners:

- Landowners may choose to donate property directly to OPS. This property may be given with or without specific restrictions, and donors may receive a charitable tax deduction on their income tax. Property may be historic or non-historic real estate and will be protected as designated by donors and the OPS mission guidelines.
- Landowners may choose to place conservation easements on property and ask OPS to act as the land trust agent for that property. Valuable natural areas or scenic views, historic, or non-historic may be protected using tax incentives and a range of conservation techniques.

- Landowners may choose a bequest to OPS as part of their will and estate planning. Bequests qualify as charitable deductions in computing inheritance taxes and ensure the preservation of land and real property for future generations.
- Landowners may choose to negotiate with OPS for the direct sale of real estate. This would allow the seller to qualify for income tax deductions and, in turn, allow OPS to keep and maintain or use real estate for re-sale in accordance with the OPS mission.

OPS also funds and manages a number of specific projects.

The Collections Committee identifies, documents, maintains, and cares for all artifacts under its care, whether presently on public display or not.

The Building Committee sees to the ongoing maintenance and repair of the Williams house, outbuildings, fences, and other structures.

There is also a Save an Old Boat Committee which is working on preserving and repairing the historic island fishing boat “Blanche.”

Each summer, primarily in June, July, and August, OPS hosts weekly “Porch Talks” that highlight Ocracoke’s unique culture and heritage. Porch talks are held in the museum’s back yard or on one of the porches. Topics of interest have included the 1957 Ocracoke Mounted Boy Scout Troop, Traveling on the Mailboat Aleta, Shipwrecks and the US Life Saving Service, Ocracoke Island Fig Trees & Fig Preserves, Storytelling, Ocracoke Island Square Dance, and much more.

Other special events that OPS has sponsored or supported include the island’s annual July 4th celebrations, the Ocracoke Music & Storytelling Festival every June, and the Ocracoke Folk School in October.

Four times every year OPS publishes their newsletter, “The Mullet Wrapper.”

During the summer of 2009, the Ocracoke Preservation Society received a generous bequest from the Geraldine Beveridge Estate. This bequest directed that the funds be used for “the preservation of buildings and the preservation and promotion of the history and heritage of Ocracoke Island.” OPS determined that the best use of this bequest would be to identify endangered historically significant property, option or purchase it, and place protective covenants on the property to ensure the continuance of the historic integrity of the property. The property would then be offered for sale.

In 2010 the Society was successful in purchasing the Emma and Simon O'Neal house. Built circa 1900, the house is located at 458 Lighthouse Road, within the historic district of Ocracoke. The home is within sight of the Ocracoke Lighthouse and within walking distance of Pamlico Sound, Springer's Point Nature Preserve and Teach's Hole where the Pirate Blackbeard was killed in 1718.

The Emma & Simon O'Neal House:



As part of the Ocracoke National Register Historic District, the house qualifies for state and federal tax benefits.

The Emma and Simon O'Neal Home had been in the O'Neal/Gaskins family for over 100 years. The Gaskins sisters have memories of the lighthouse beaming into their bedroom window and spending many a summer evening sitting on the front porch. The home was originally built for their grandparents at the time of their marriage. The land was given to them by Emma's family, Elijah and Elizabeth Styron.

The Emma and Simon O'Neal home is a fine example of the Ocracoke "story and a jump" style architecture with two bedrooms on the second floor and a living room and one bedroom on the first floor. The kitchen, bath and a utility room are located in a rear addition

to the original house. The house has 1,056 square feet of living space.

This frame house features a steep gabled roof with an open hipped porch, turned posts and cedar shake covering. The O'Neal home has its original staircase, wooden two over two sash windows, the original corbelled chimney and original interior beadboard walls and ceilings.

The home sits on a large lot consisting of 8,963 square foot with an abundance of native vegetation including cedar and pine trees.

The house is in need of new plumbing, electrical and basic systems as well as raised footings and some TLC.

Be sure to visit the OPS museum when you are on the island. You can make a contribution anytime to help ensure the continuation of the valuable work being done by the Society. [To donate, please click here, or on the photo at the top of the page.](#)