

Powered, controlled flight and the Outer Banks, especially Kitty Hawk, NC, will be forever linked in our minds.

The Wright Brothers never set foot on Ocracoke Island, but airplanes have been landing here for many years, at first using the flat, hard-packed beach sand as a natural landing strip. Although difficult to imagine today, in the early years before the barrier dunes were erected and vegetation took hold, planes would often taxi almost to the front door of the "Wahab Village Hotel" (better known today as "Blackbeard's Lodge").

Older Ocracokers also tell the story of the day in the late 1930's or early 1940's when Charles Lindberg himself touched down on the north end of the island and visited with the crew of the Hatteras Inlet Coast Guard Station.

On October 12, 1937, Mr. Thomas Wallace Howard, Ocracoke's Postmaster, had the honor of sending the first airmail to, among other places, Kitty Hawk, NC, the birthplace of aviation.

#### First airmail to Kitty Hawk, NC (from Ocracoke):



My grandfather, Homer Howard, mailed a letter to my father on that day. The imprint on the envelope reads:

"FIRST ALL NORTH CAROLINA AIR MAIL FLIGHTS  
OCT. 11-16, 1937  
Wright Memorial, Kitty Hawk, NC  
Ocracoke, 'The Fisherman's Paradise'"



The letter reads,

“Ocracoke NC  
October 10th 1937

Dear Son

Will rite you just a few lines to let [you] no we are all well but mama[‘s] hand[s] are worse again. Would very much [like] to see [you] all to day. Give our best regards to the old folks. Now listen [I] am Sending you this letter in order that you get one of the[m] that ever went by air mail. Take care of the envelop Keep it as a Souvenir Hand it down to your child & his chind [children]. So you will all ways no when the first air mail left Ocracok NC

good luck & much Love to all  
write soon your Loving Father, Homer”

In the 1950’s Bill Cochran, a retired Air Force colonel and pilot, moved to Ocracoke with his wife, Ruth. Together they operated Stanley Wahab’s “Silver Lake Inn,” now called the “Island Inn.” During this time Bill, who earlier had run a flying service from Buxton to Ocracoke, also served as mail carrier for Ocracoke during inclement weather. Ruth remembers, “When it was windy and the mail boat couldn’t go, he’d fly the mail in. One time the wind was so strong that I had to go out and hold down the wing while he was warming up; the engine.”

### Bill Cochran’s “Airlift to Ocracoke:”



### Bill Cochran loading mail into his plane:



After 1957 pilots used the newly paved and straight stretch of highway 12 between the

village and the National Park Service campground as an airstrip. It wasn't until the early 1960's, however, that an official, though unmanned, airstrip was built...thanks in large measure to eccentric, part-time island resident, Sam Jones.

Sam, originally from mainland Hyde County, married Ocracoke native, Ruth Kelly. Sam was a prominent businessman/industrialist and owner of Berkeley Iron & Machine Works in Norfolk, Virginia. He enjoyed spending time on Ocracoke, but preferred to travel to the island in his medium-sized twin engine aircraft. In the 1940's and 1950's the daily mail boat trip from Atlantic, NC took four hours, far too long to suit Mr. Jones.

Sam wanted a paved landing strip. Although an improved landing surface would certainly benefit him, Sam accurately promoted the idea as a service to the local community in times of emergency.

With the help of Albert W. Cowper, Resident Superior Court Judge of Lenoir County, and an avid sailor who frequently visited Ocracoke, Sam made contact with Kinston attorney, Thomas J. White, chairman of the NC Advisory Budget Commission and chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. White, incidentally, was an avid fisherman and hunter who loved Ocracoke Island and the Outer Banks.

As the result of considerable lobbying by Judge Cowper, Mr. Jones, and others, appropriation for the 3000 foot paved airstrip was approved, and it was built in the early 1960's. The airstrip is about one mile from the village and little more than 100 yards from the ocean, at an elevation of 5 feet above sea level. The FAA identifier is W95.

In 1964, Sam Jones, newly enthusiastic about easier air travel to the island, commissioned a sign to be placed at the airport. It read, "White-Cowper Airport."

Sam is reported to have remarked, "I named the Ocracoke airstrip 'White-Cowper Airport' because Senator Tom White got the money appropriated, and I named it for Judge Albert Cowper for getting Tom White to do it."

The sign has been gone many years, and few people remember the earlier history of our tiny airstrip. Since then, however, it has been used countless times by aviation enthusiasts, visitors, emergency medical personnel, and even delivery companies...especially last year after hurricane Isabel cut off major delivery routes to the island.

Today there is a new service being offered by Ocracoke resident, Phil Platt, of Pelican Airways.....scheduled flights from Norfolk, VA & Beaufort, NC to Ocracoke Island and back

again.

**Pelican Airways' Britten-Norman Islander Aircraft:**



Day	Flight #	Departure	Arrival	One-Way	Round-Trip
Friday	11	Norfolk: 3:20 pm	Ocracoke: 4:40 pm	\$129.00	\$244.00
Friday	15	Beaufort: 7:25 pm	Ocracoke: 7:50 pm	\$79.00	\$149.00
Saturday	17	Norfolk: 12:20 pm	Ocracoke: 1:40 pm	\$129.00	\$244.00
Saturday	21	Beaufort: 4:30 pm	Ocracoke: 5:00 pm	\$79.00	\$149.00
Sunday	22	Ocracoke: 1:30 pm	Norfolk: 2:50 pm	\$129.00	\$244.00
Sunday	24	Ocracoke: 5:30 pm	Beaufort: 5:55 pm	\$79.00	\$149.00
Monday	28	Ocracoke: 10:30 am	Norfolk: 11:50 am	\$129.00	\$244.00
Monday	30	Ocracoke: 2:30 pm	Beaufort: 2:55 pm	\$79.00	\$149.00

Pelican Airways will also be serving the North Carolina towns of Manteo, Hatteras and New Bern, per request. Call for schedules, fares and special family rates (1-888-7 Pelican [1-888-773-5422], or 1-252-928-1661).

Now, instead of driving for 3 1/2 hours from Norfolk to get to the ferry where you may have to wait in line, you can be delivered from one airport to the next in about an hour. The flight from Beaufort to Ocracoke takes less than 30 minutes.....Plus, you get a great view!

In addition to these regular scheduled services, Pelican Airways has also scheduled flight-seeing tours every day of the week. The fare is \$40.00 per person. Be sure to bring your camera!

**Flight-Seeing Tours:**

Sunday	11:00 am
Monday	9:00 am & 7:00 pm
Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday	12:00 pm & 5:00 pm
Friday	11:00 am
Saturday	9:00 am & 7:00 pm

For reservations or more information call 1-888-7 Pelican (1-888-773-5422), or 1-252-928-1661.

For the real ambitious, you can also take flying lessons.

Until next month,

Philip and the entire crew at Village Craftsmen

(Special thanks to Thomas J. White, III for information about the White-Cowper airstrip.)