

This month I provide our readers with a brief glimpse into the past with a reprint of an article published on April 11, 1942 in *The State* magazine. Keep in mind that this article appeared just three months before the US Navy established their amphibious base on the island. The World War II naval presence on Ocracoke had a significant impact on the island, the village, and the community. The navy dredged the harbor (thereafter the wide but shallow Cockle Creek became the present-day deep-water Silver Lake), filled in the tidal “guts” that divided the village into two main sections (Around Creek & Down Point), brought more than 500 military men (and a few women) into the community, and gave many residents their first taste of the modern world.

Today, Ocracoke still boasts a level of isolation unusual in the twenty-first century, and perhaps more importantly, a vibrant sense of community more reminiscent of bygone days. But the island now enjoys most of the conveniences of modern life, including dependable electric power, telephones (land line and cell), municipal water, Internet service, fire & rescue services, and much more.

Imagine Ocracoke in April of 1942 Without ferries the only way to the mainland and back was by way of the daily four hour mailboat trip across Pamlico Sound. By today’s standards visitors were few and infrequent. Most folks walked to visit relatives or friends, or to go to the general store. Drinking water was dipped or pumped by hand from round wooden cisterns. Bathrooms were outside, behind the house. Wild ponies meandered through the sandy lanes and children sometimes rode their horses to school. Well-tended gardens graced practically every yard, and chickens were as common as sparrows. Dramatic shipwrecks were still vivid memories, and life proceeded at a slower pace. Join me now as we look at island life from a visitor’s perspective in 1942 (I’ve added the photos!):

“[Ocracoke] has been a favorite summering place with large numbers of people, particularly those who live in Washington, Greenville, New Bern, and other towns in the eastern part of the state. Hunters and fishermen have visited it from all parts of the country.

It has no paved streets, no power, except that which is supplied by private plants, no sewerage or water systems, none of the many civic improvements that you will find elsewhere, but it’s the grandest place in the world to visit and, if you listen to the natives, it’s also the grandest place in the world to live. The houses are mostly two-story frame structures, each of them being immaculately clean and most of them well painted.

Practically every house has its small garden and chickens. The entire population of the island- it’s around 700-depends upon the sea for its livelihood. No, not quite all either because there are a number of men who are in the Coast Guard or else have been retired with pensions.

Unpaved Howard Street, ca. 2004:



Wahab Village, originated by Stanley Wahab, local boy who made good in the big city of Baltimore, has a first-class hotel [now known at Blackbeard's Lodge, but then called the Wahab Village Hotel], cottages [now part of Edward's Motel], and other accommodations. It promises to be quite a development.

Ocracoke lighthouse is one of the oldest on the coast. The Coast Guard station is located on the sound side of the island.

We didn't get to go there on this trip through Hyde County, but we have been there any number of times in the past. There are no people anywhere whose friendship we value more highly than we do that of those hardy, whole-souled folks at Ocracoke. If you've never been there you have missed one of the most interesting of all places within the boundaries of North Carolina."

Ocracoke Lighthouse:



I'm sure I speak for most, if not all, of our island residents when I echo the words of this sixty five year old article, that Ocracoke is "the grandest place in the world to live."