

Fall Greetings from all of us at Village Craftsmen!

We hope all of you had a Thanksgiving holiday filled with many blessings. In spite of recent tragedies we are all keenly aware of much to be thankful for.

On Ocracoke, family and friends gathered around traditional Thanksgiving tables to celebrate this quintessential American holiday. I was privileged to share in two bountiful dinners that included the familiar roast turkey as well as copious quantities of vegetable dishes, breads and desserts, all provided by the more than two dozen people who gathered for the feasts.

An Ocracoke Thanksgiving Potluck:



My island get-togethers are seldom complete without some good old home-made music. This holiday we were all treated to the considerable talents of the Molasses Creek musicians and assorted friends who picked up guitars, fiddles, and banjos to entertain us after dinner.

Home-made Music, Ocracoke Style:



Recently I was asked to write a short article about Ocracoke for an upcoming booklet to be published by the Hyde County Chamber of Commerce. Some of you who are new to Ocracoke may not know many of the basic historical details about our island. With this in mind, I am reproducing my article below. There may even be some new information for some of our long-time visitors. I hope you enjoy it.

Ocracoke Island! The name itself suggests history, enchantment, even magic.

Some of the earliest recorded names for the island (Wokokon, Wocokon) reflect the island's Native American connection. Ocracoke's first residents were members of the pre-Columbian Wocon tribe. Eventually the "W" was dropped and spellings such as 'Okok' and "Ocrkok" evolved into the present-day "Ocracoke."

The European history of the island begins on November 11, 1719 when John Lovick, Secretary of the Colony of North Carolina and a Deputy of the Lords Proprietors, was granted the island of Ocracoke, containing 2,110 acres.

During the early eighteenth century Ocracoke was used chiefly for raising cattle and sheep. Because larger vessels were unable to navigate the shallow Pamlico Sound, Ocracoke Island soon became a settlement for pilots who transported sought-after goods to ports on the North Carolina mainland.

Pirates have long been a part of our colorful island history. Buccaneers continued to use the island as a temporary campsite even after the infamous pirate Blackbeard was killed here in a naval battle on November 22, 1718.

On July 30, 1759 William Howard, of the Province of North Carolina, bought Ocracoke Island for £105. He was the first owner to make his home on the island, and may be the same William Howard who served as quartermaster to Blackbeard the pirate earlier in that century. Many of his descendants continue to live on the island to this day.

Over the next two hundred years Ocracoke prospered and grew. Located near the southern end of the island, and nestled around one of the most beautiful natural harbors in the new country, Ocracoke village attracted sailors, pilots, and commercial fishermen. Eventually, as sturdier homes were built and more families were raised on this isolated ribbon of sand, stores, churches, and a school were established. Today the year-round population numbers about 750.

Throughout its history Ocracoke and its people have been witnesses to a number of important events. Ocracoke Inlet, with its deep and navigable channel, was a strategic point of entry into Pamlico Sound and ultimately to mainland North Carolina during both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. During the War Between the States, local residents served proudly in both the Union and Confederate armies. Fort Ocracoke, on nearby Beacon Island,

was the scene of a naval attack in 1861. The fortress was abandoned during that time, and later destroyed. Recently, marine archaeologists have uncovered numerous artifacts in the vicinity.

World War II saw the construction of a naval base on Silver Lake Harbor and the erection of the first radar tower near the beach on what is now known as "Loop Shack Hill." The war was closer to our shores than many Americans realized. Throughout the conflict local residents reported seeing numerous ships burning off-shore as the result of aggressive U-boat activity.

The British Cemetery, next to the historic Howard family graveyard, is the final resting place of four sailors from HMS Bedfordshire, an armed trawler, which was torpedoed on May 11, 1942. Island residents discovered their bodies on the beach shortly after the tragedy and arranged for a fitting burial under the shade of several ancient live oak trees. Today the graves are under the care of the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and the US Coast Guard. Every spring, a memorial service is held to honor these and other brave sailors who served in WWII.

The British Cemetery:



Ocracoke residents have survived not only world political unrest, but hurricanes and shipwrecks, as well. In the 1800's many islanders were owners, captains or sailors on schooners that plied waters along the eastern seaboard. Over the years, more than 500 vessels have met their fate in the waters around nearby Diamond Shoals. Many older homes in the Ocracoke historic district were built with lumber salvaged from ships that wrecked in storm-tossed seas. Not a few local residents are direct descendants of the brave men who served in the U.S. Life Saving Service. Their heroic deeds during many a daring rescue constitute a noble legacy that has been passed on to the younger generations.

Major hurricanes in 1899, 1933, and 1944 as well as more recent storms have pummeled the island with high winds and rising water. Although native islanders all have stories of exciting encounters with ferocious storms, very little property damage has resulted, and no one has ever lost a life in a hurricane.

Today Ocracoke is host to a growing number of vacationers, especially in the summer months. Sixteen miles of pristine, undeveloped beach, a part of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, beckon first-time and veteran visitors every season. Beachcombing, sunbathing and surf fishing are among the most popular summertime activities.

In addition, Ocracoke boat captains offer fishing charters in the relatively shallow waters of Pamlico Sound, as well as off-shore in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream.

Many visitors prefer to explore the shoreline in kayaks or sailboats. There is ample opportunity to observe herons, egrets and other waterfowl, as well as turtles, dolphins and assorted sea life.

Seven miles northeast of the village the National Park Service cares for the descendants of a once-wild herd of ponies. Some believe the original ponies were brought to the island by the earliest settlers; others think they swam ashore from ships that wrecked on nearby sand bars. For years Ocracoke hosted an annual Independence Day pony penning. In the mid-1950's Captain Marvin Howard organized the only mounted Boy Scout troop in the country.

In the village, many people enjoy biking or walking, especially along historic Howard Street where small family cemeteries, gnarled old live oak trees, and moss-covered fences suggest an era not so long ago when life proceeded at a slower pace.

One of Ocracoke's most popular destinations is the picturesque white lighthouse and keeper's quarters. Built in 1823, this beacon is one of the oldest lighthouses still in active service in the U.S. The steady beam can be seen up to 14 miles out to sea and serves as the most recognized symbol of the community of Ocracoke.

When you visit Ocracoke Island be sure to take time to reflect on all that makes this place so special to those of us who live here. Although Ocracoke has many outstanding restaurants and fine shops, don't forget that the island boasts a rich history and a colorful past. Because of many years of cultural isolation many native Ocracokers still speak a distinctive brogue and continue to celebrate their unique island heritage.

Slow down. Sit for a spell on the store porch. Enjoy a spectacular sunset. Wait for the boats to pull up to the docks with flounder, crabs or clams. You will be rewarded with a sense of history, as well as a feeling of peace and calm. If you stick around long enough you might make a few new friends. Over time Ocracokers might even share their stories, their hopes and their dreams. Then you will feel like you have become a small part of this unique island

community.

We thank all of you who honor and treasure our island home. We wish you all a wonderful Fall and look forward to hearing from you soon or seeing you on your next visit to Ocracoke.

Philip and the entire staff at Village Craftsmen