

Recently a former resident of Ocracoke asked me if I would write a newsletter about the old Howard cemetery on British Cemetery Road. I immediately realized that there is much there to write about. I hope this overview will provide our readers with a broader appreciation of the cemetery and some of our island history.

The Old Howard Cemetery:



(Click on picture to see larger image.)

William Howard, Sr. became the island's last colonial owner when he purchased Ocracoke Island in 1759. He was the first owner to make Ocracoke his home. No one knows where he came from or who his parents were, although he was born ca. 1700. Some think he hailed from the mainland of eastern North Carolina. Other family stories suggest that he may have been in St. Mary's county, Maryland between 1740 and 1759. Perhaps that was his home, if not his birthplace.

Other information indicates that Ocracoke's William Howard may have been the same William Howard who served as quartermaster to Blackbeard the pirate in 1718. The quartermaster was captured in Virginia in the Spring of 1718, convicted, and sentenced to hang. Fortunately for him the king's "Act of Grace" arrived in Williamsburg the day before

his execution, and he was released. He disappeared and never rejoined his pirate captain. Thus he was spared the gallows....or death in the bloody battle at Ocracoke Inlet in November of 1718.

Perhaps Quartermaster Howard migrated to Maryland after his release in Virginia, and eventually, four decades later, made his way back to Ocracoke where Blackbeard and his crew had frequently anchored. Or maybe it was his son or grandson who settled on Ocracoke. We may never know William Howard's true background and history. However we do know that he died sometime after 1794. Jonathan Price, in his 1795 map and article, "A Description of Occacock Inlet," writes that about thirty families were living on the island, and that one of the "original proprietors" had reached his "ninetieth year" and did not "appear to feel any of the infirmities of age." This was undoubtedly William Howard, Sr.

We also know that William Howard fathered three children by his first wife, Elizabeth (George, William, Jr., and Susannah). He fathered three more children by his second wife, Susanna (Abigail, Wallace, and Simon).

Susannah Howard married Francis Jackson and they began a long line of Jacksons on Ocracoke. Abigail married a Williams, another traditional island name. Wallace and Simon never married or had children.

All of the Howards of Ocracoke Island thus trace their ancestry to either William Jr. or George.

William Jr.'s descendants settled along Howard Street and many are buried there beside the sandy lane, in several family graveyards surrounded by picket fences. A number of William Jr.'s descendants still live along Howard Street, or nearby.

George Howard and his family are buried in the Howard cemetery on British Cemetery Road. George may have been the first son of William Howard, Sr. Born in 1749, he lived the majority of his life on Ocracoke Island, and died there in 1806. His grave is the oldest in the cemetery. To my knowledge it is the oldest marked grave on the island. Older graves, including his parent's, were almost certainly designated with wooden markers which have rotted away and/or been carried away by storm tides over the years.

George Howard was married to Ann (last name unknown). She is buried beside her husband near the front, left side of the cemetery. According to her tombstone, she was born in 1724, and died in 1841. Her family, not wanting anyone to think the stonecutter had made a mistake, added these words to her stone: "Aged 117 years." Her epitaph continues,

" Lo! the prisoner is released, Lightened of her fleshly load, Where the weary are at rest.
She is gathered unto God."

Whether or not Ann Howard was actually born in 1724 and lived to be 117 years old we will never know. But clearly her family believed her to be that old.

Ann Howard's Tombstone:



(Click on picture to see larger image.)

Besides George and Ann, nine other Howards are buried within the weathered picket fence (those in boldface below are children of George and Ann; those in red are their grandchildren): William (1776 - 1851, son of George & Ann), Agnes (1780 - 1857, William's wife), George Washington (1814 - 1844, son of William & Agnes), Sarah (1810 - 1828,

daughter of William & Agnes), John (1778 - 1832, son of George & Ann), Anne (1777 - 1876, John's wife), Richard (1810 - 1857, son of John & Anne), Eliza (1812 - 1846, Richard's wife), and George (1802 - 1831, son of John & Anne).

George and Ann had four other children, Cornelius and George, Jr., both of whom moved to the mainland, Eliza, who married John Dixon of Portsmouth Island, and Mary Elizabeth.

Eliza Bradley Howard (1808 - 1870), daughter of William and Agnes Howard, married Job Wahab (1802 - 1860).

Eliza Bradley Howard:



Eliza and Job had fifteen children. Today twenty of the graves in the Howard cemetery bear the Wahab name. They are, of course, all descendants of George Howard, but the cemetery is now sometimes referred to as the Howard-Wahab cemetery.

Eliza Bradley Howard Wahab's Tombstone:



Job Wahab's Tombstone:



In the right front row of the cemetery, next to Eliza and Job's graves, lie several of their children. Some in particular are of special interest. In his 1956 book, *Ocracoke*, Carl Goerch includes a chapter entitled "Died Before He Was Born." He refers to the gravestone of Warren Wahab, son of Eliza and Job Wahab. According to Goerch the inscription states that Warren was born in 1855 and died in 1842.

Sure enough, if you walk up to the fence and peer into the cemetery, you will see Warren's marker, seemingly stating that he died thirteen years before he was born. This is how Goerch surmises what happened:

"Relatives of Warren Wahab placed an order for the tombstone and had it made in Washington, New Bern or some other town along the coast. The man who cut the stone either was careless with his figures or else they hadn't been written very distinctly. When the stone arrived at Ocracoke, the probabilities are that the error was discovered

immediately. But it would have taken such a long time to get another stone that the family decided to put up this one and have it altered at a later and more convenient date.....Weeks passed into months, months passed into years and eventually—well what's the use of bothering about it at this late date?"

If you look along the front row you will notice that Warren was one of three of Eliza and Job's children who all died within seven days in September of 1842. Job died on September 4. He was seven years old, having been born in 1835. Jonathan and Warren died on September 11. A glance at the tombstones will show that both Job and Warren appear to have been born in 1855. Careful inspection reveals, however, that Job was actually born in 1835, and Warren was born in 1833.

Over time the 3s have weathered to look like 5s. The difference is most noticeable on Job's marker. No stonecutter made any mistake. Several years ago I had the opportunity to peruse the Wahab family Bible. Sure enough Warren's birth date was listed as 1833, and Job's was 1835. But Goerch's story is still bandied about by folks even today. I suppose it does make an entertaining story.

Job Wahab's Tombstone (1835 - 1842):



Several other family names are in evidence in the Howard cemetery. Captain and Mrs. James Best (she is also the daughter of William and Agnes Howard), Susan Farrow (daughter of Richard Howard), Louisa Heggart (daughter of John Howard), as well as a Dailey, a few Gaskins, some Williamses, and a Willis (all kin to the Howards and/or the Wahabs) are laid to rest there.

In addition, baby Eliza Ann Chase, just over one year old, is buried in the Howard cemetery. She is the daughter of Thyrza Howard (sister of Eliza Bradley Howard Wahab) and Elisha Chase. Elisha Chase was a sea captain from New England. He apparently descended from a long line of prominent New Englanders. Sometime after the death of their daughter in 1824 Elisha decided to give up life at sea, and moved his family to Missouri on a wagon train. Along the way Elisha and Thyrza fell ill with fevers, and Thyrza died. She was buried along the trail. When Elisha recovered he said he had medicines that he believed would have cured them both, but no one else knew about them. Descendants of Elisha Chase and

Thyrza Howard Chase still live in the mid-west today.

The most recent grave is that of Myra Wahab who died in 2003. She is interred beside her husband, Robert Stanley Wahab, who died in 1967. Stanley, born in 1888, was the son of James Hatton Wahab and Martha Ann Howard Wahab. Hatton was a surfman in the Cedar Hammock (Hatteras Inlet) Life Saving Station, and Stanley attended school there as a youngster. Stanley went to sea as a young man, then enrolled in Goldey Commercial College. He returned to Ocracoke and spent much of his energy promoting the island as a tourist destination. Among other things, in 1936 he built the Wahab Village Hotel (now Blackbeard's Lodge, today owned and operated by a descendant).

Stanley was fond of explaining that the Ocracoke Wahabs (Wahab rhymes with "Day Crab") were all descended from a shipwrecked Arab sailor. That may be, but it is more likely that the Wahabs are part of the Scottish Wahab (Wauchope, Wauchop, or Waughop) family. Of course, the story of the Arab sailor is much more colorful!

Tombstones in the Howard Cemetery:

(Need Photo)

The next time you are riding your bike by the old Howard cemetery, stop for a few minutes and look over the fence. Notice the tombstones for Ann and George Howard; Eliza Bradley and Job Wahab; Jonathan, Warren, & Job Wahab; Eliza Ann Chase, and others.

Island graveyards contain quite a bit of history, especially if you know what to look for.