

For years newspaper reporters, authors of magazine articles, and long-time visitors to Ocracoke have extolled the virtues of island life. People routinely mention our extensive, pristine, undeveloped beach; our laid-back, historic village; and the palpable sense of shared community here.

Of course, Ocracoke is not perfect. Summertime ferry traffic snaking through the center of town can be frustratingly annoying for residents trying to get to the store for a gallon of milk. And residents sometimes come into conflict over property lines, visions for our future, or personal issues.

Nevertheless, Ocracoke is a wonderful community, full of intelligent, compassionate, and creative people. Couple that with the stunningly beautiful Pamlico Sound, rich fishing areas, miles of open-access Atlantic Ocean beach, quiet sandy lanes, mild temperatures, and little or no stress from crime, major highways, or urban blight, and most folks consider Ocracoke a virtual paradise.

Why, then, the title, “One Reason to NOT Move to Ocracoke?”

In spite of all the benefits of living on this remote Outer Banks island, some tasks that are routine elsewhere can become incredibly complex here.

As many of our long-term readers know, Ocracoke was without official street names for most of our history. It was not uncommon for someone to identify a home as “just up the road from where Myrtle and John used to live.” Or “back behind Gloria and Jack’s, near the community cemetery.”

Some roads had more than one popular name. Sunset Boulevard could also be Lighthouse Road (at least before the trees grew tall enough to obscure the distant top of the lighthouse), or Firehouse Road (even though the firehouse, like the lighthouse, didn’t actually sit on the road), or Ammunition Dump Road (an unflattering, but historic name from World War II).

Local folks had little trouble giving or receiving directions. But visitors were often left confused and bewildered. Then along came enhanced 911 service to the island. The emergency medical technicians, some of whom were sent from the mainland on a rotating basis, needed clear, consistent, and unambiguous street names and numbers. Summer visitors needed to be able to direct emergency personnel to their cottages in case of fire, accident, or illness.

A committee was formed and official street names adopted. Houses, businesses, and other structures were assigned numbers.



Village Craftsmen is on Howard Street, one of the few street names with a long and uncontroversial history. But that consistency is little consolation when mail and packages are misdelivered or returned to the sender. For you see, although UPS delivers packages to our doors, the US Postal Service has never provided Ocracoke with home delivery of mail. We all receive our mail at the Post Office, and have learned to list our Post Office Box when we expect mail through the Postal Service, but to include some street address when ordering from a company that uses UPS.



But what do we do if we don't know how a package will be sent? It doesn't always work to give both a PO Box and a street address. The mere listing of a PO Box is often sufficient for a computer to reject an address outright. So we have become creative.

Over time I have used many different addresses when ordering merchandise by mail, phone, or internet. Sometimes I used "248 Howard Street," or "701 Howard Street," or "86 Howard Street," all numbers derived from three post office boxes under my name. Back in the old days, if a package was sent by US Postal Service, this was enough to alert the local post office of my box number. Actually this was totally unnecessary on this end because the clerks knew every resident's box number by heart. I once even sent a letter locally with "C" as the complete address. It was placed in the proper box without a thought.

And the above addresses also worked if a package was sent UPS. In that case, any made-up address was sufficient. Sometimes I would use "1 Howard Street," or just to be impish, "10601 Howard Street, Sixteenth Floor, Suite 206. It didn't really matter. By giving ANY street address I could deceive senders into believing that they had a legitimate address. I knew that Grant, our local UPS driver, was thoroughly familiar with the island, and would have no problem finding me.

Then came official addresses. Village Craftsmen is now 170 Howard Street. My home is 46 Lawton Lane, and I still own a house at 30 Lawton Lane. My official post office boxes continue to be numbers 248, 701, and 86.

This year I decided to apply for Social Security. I went on-line and discovered that they needed a certified birth certificate. Since my father had left Ocracoke when he was sixteen years old, and lived for thirty-five years "up north," I had been born in Pennsylvania. I decided to use the internet to find the right agency that would have my records.

After a frustrating and time-consuming search I located the Pennsylvania Department of Health's web site, and determined that the information I needed was located in the Office of Vital Records.

Finding the correct internal web page was even more frustrating. Eventually I located it. I was offered four options for obtaining my birth record: Mail, Fax, In person, or On-line.

I immediately ruled out the In Person option, though, as it turned out, that might have been my best choice. On-line seemed the logical option, so I clicked the icon. The form was typical and didn't take too long to complete. Except that I discovered at the end that they would not accept a PO Box for an address, even though the certificate would be sent by US Postal Service.

In recent years, as the Post Office has become more automated, all mail for Ocracoke is mechanically sorted in Rocky Mount. Since Ocracoke has no home delivery, mail without a Post Office Box is returned to sender. No matter that Ocracoke is small, and that the Post Office clerks would be able to deliver the mail. It is simply sent back to the sender. I needed to include the Post Office Box in order to get my birth certificate.

I decided to try the Fax option. That form would accept a Post Office Box. But in order to complete that form I needed to include a copy of my driver's license. You guessed it...the form required the addresses to match, and my driver's license now lists my 911 physical street address.

Maybe I could use the Mail In form, I wondered. No. That form also required a copy of my driver's license.

My only remaining option was to make a telephone call. As usual, there was interminable button pushing, as I was shuttled from one automated extension to the next. After spelling out V-I_T_A_L_R_E_C_O_R_D_S, and other equally time-consuming names and words I finally got a real person, to whom I explained my dilemma.

Of course, she needed to transfer me to yet another office.

The next *bureaucrat* was "all business." I tried my best to explain the situation again. She *had apparently never encountered a small community without home delivery*. Before I could finish my explanation, she interrupted. Speaking a mile a minute, she rattled off her prepared speech, giving telephone numbers and web addresses. It wasn't what I needed. I tried my best to make myself clear. She ignored my pleas.

I really couldn't understand this harried and rude woman. When I told her that I didn't hear what she said, she began to yell. She didn't just speak louder and more clearly. She was yelling, as if I were a misbehaving child. Staying calm and collected I explained again. Finally she began to actually listen to what I was saying. Lo and behold, she was able to give me the information I needed.

It was late in the afternoon. I was exhausted and losing patience, but she was able to take my application over the phone. Eventually I received my certified birth certificate.

If you value your peace of mind, think twice before considering a move to Ocracoke. Or maybe I should say, if you value your peace of mind, move here, take off your shoes, relax, and forget about bureaucracies and all of those other "benefits" of the world out there. You'll live longer.