

The following article is from *The Deming Headlight* (Deming, New Mexico) · Fri, Oct 5, 1923. No author is cited. Although there are a few fanciful comments (e.g. how Ocracoke got its name), the article generally provides an accurate view of island life 100 years ago. Enjoy!

Ocracoke, N.C. - Ocracoke, a throwback to the days of the English explorers and a queer mixture of the romance of the South Seas, the religion of the Puritans and the civilization of the nineteenth century, is the quaintest little town in America.

The eight hundred inhabitants, who have spent their lives here, following in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers, live from the fish in the sea at their doors and the figs as fine as Smyrna's which grow wild in the sand mountains in their back yards.

The main street of Ocracoke is a creek. The town has no streets or roads, only footpaths running down to the beach, or connecting the rear door of one dweller with that of another. There is not an officer of the law in town and although some of the doors have locks, relics of bygone days, the keys long have been lost and forgotten.

The town is on an island by the same name, fifteen miles in length, barely a mile wide and five hours journey by boat from the mainland. The island of Ocracoke is within sight of the graveyard of the Atlantic, Hatteras' wretched shoals, and occasionally at dawn the natives have arisen to find an ocean steamer stranded almost in their yards.

Horses run wild outside this little town, just as do the mustangs in isolated sections of western plains. Cattle, as wild as on the pampas of Argentina, rove the ocean beach to the northward. There are no dogs on the island, but cats have multiplied until there are hundreds. Having rid the village of mice and rats, the felines have almost eradicated the many snakes which once thrived in Ocracoke.

There are thousands of chickens about the place, but they are community property and no fences to restrict them are in evidence anywhere. Tame geese, brants and duck also are numerous. They are used to decoy the millions of Labrador wild fowls which swarm in the marshes of Ocracoke and Currituck to feed.

The people are just as unusual as the town itself. They dance almost nightly, but their dances are the ones introduced by their grandfathers and the shimmy, tango and fox trot are as strange here as crime. A favorite melody of the island orchestra is "Pop Goes the

Weasel." Lamp light is the only illumination after dark.

The great lighthouse of the village sheds its beam over Ocracoke as it flashes far out to sea to warn away navigators. Meals in the town cost eighty cents and lodging can be procured for ten cents. Hosts usually are angry if their guest does not eat heartily of the supper, which ordinarily consists of fresh fried fish, fried chicken, fried ham, stewed oysters, clam chowder, baked potatoes, rice, hot cakes, coffee and fig preserves.

The race line is rigidly drawn in Ocracoke, but there is one negro permitted to reside here, and he is regarded as indispensable. He is the island sexton.

The natives tell a simple story of the division in the church. The original church was the Southern Methodist. An elder wanted an organ and another said the idea was preposterous, insisting musical instruments had no place in houses of worship. When the progressives rolled the organ into the building he secured a missionary and established the Northern church. The congregations now are about equally divided and equally strange is the fact that although in the heart of the "Democratic south," most of the men of the Northern church are Democrats and those of the Southern branch are Republicans.

Ocracoke is without a peace officer, as there is no crime. A magistrate gave up his commission last year without trying a case. Tragedy has stalked thru the little community, but that was when seafaring residents battled with the elements and lost. The islanders are as expert boatmen as the Kanakas of the Pacific and they ride outriggers to ballast their tiny fishing crafts.

While most of the men have journeyed from home, visiting port towns, few of the women have been farther away than the little settlement on the mainland, where the Ocarcokers go on occasions to attend the theatre or visit a doctor. The villagers are a big sun-tanned lot, running to blue eyes and freckles.

The town is one of the historic spots of the Southland. The first English speaking colonists to arrive in the western world landed first at Ocracoke. They were the lost colonists of Virginia Dare, who went to Roanoke Island and vanished.

Edward Teach, the pirate "blackbeard," caroused here, gave the place its name and met his death, according to legend. He was killed when a British naval expedition attacked his two ships. Teach, confident of victory, longed for daybreak, the villagers say, and cried, "O, crow cock," and from that phrase with alterations came the name Ocracoke.