

By Capt. Marvin W. Howard, Ocracoke, N.C., originally published in the *Coastland Times*, November 12, 1954, re-published with minor editing (click on the links at the end of the article to view images of the original article).



November is here, come again to visit us with cold, blue, raw days, where, if one is not careful, one may catch cold from extra efforts because it's cool, yet not realizing it is still warm enough to perspire freely and thus we catch a cold. These cold, blue, raw and cloudy days bring falling of the leaves from all the trees along the Banks except the evergreens. As one follows the shadows along the winding trails or along the sandy roads so familiar to the Banks, one sees bushels of acorns lying on the ground. The many golden-yellow, serrated seeds of the sea-oat likewise lie in the lee of the sand hills, and the purple flower of the wild-pea has almost vanished, while the pods are bursting, letting their seeds fall for the use of wildlife. As one feels the bite of the blustery, windy day, particularly if a hunter, the urge to take gun in hand, call Rover or Brando or Nipper, and go a-hunting, is strong. It would not

suffice alone to hunt birds, but rather to take in the wonders of autumn's beauty among the woodlands, the salt grasses and the sand hills. All of this, if properly viewed, presents a beauty unexcelled anywhere.

Our freedom to hunt, to play, to be able to enjoy these wonders are ours only because of our Democratic Government or Republic, whether you judge it by the pony you ride, the old jeep you go fishing in, the speed boat you own, the limousine in the garage, the freedom to worship at the church of your choice, the school you attend, the food on your table or the freedom to speak in public without fear. You are fortunate by the fact that you are living under a system of government based on the dignity and freedom of the individual, that derives its powers from the bottom up rather than the top down. The four freedoms\* were brought to the public by the late Franklin D. Roosevelt. These freedoms we enjoy in the U.S.A., and especially along the Outer Banks, where thus far the land has never been posted to any great extent. The hunter can stroll with his dog "heeling" or watching the "retrieve" as the hunter kills a dove or other wildlife in season.

### **Beauty is Everywhere**

The beauty rare can be seen along the hills, through the lonesome woods, and in the wide open marshes where the green salt grasses are interspersed with another salt grass or wood, blood-colored. A marsh hen or rail cackles and jumps, flies away, apparently laughing at the lover of nature, too far away for the kill. So, too, the slow moving heron or bittern hides, camouflaged by reeds or cattails.

That wonderful classic, *In Praise of Blue Grass\*\**, can well describe the flat openings at the head of creeks where cattle feed, and horses wild accompany them. Along these openings, or flat prairie lands, nesting between the woods and hills, a creek wanders through the marshes to the sound. The salt sage is turning purple and shows brilliantly in northern winds. The grass is still green in the pocosins and adds to nature's beauty, and so I'll add to this writing words from *In Praise of Blue Grass*:

"Grass is the forgiveness of Nature — her constant benediction. Fields trampled with battle, saturated with blood, torn with the ruts of cannon, grow green again with grass, and carnage is forgotten. Streets abandoned by traffic become grass grown, like rural lanes, and are obliterated. Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal. Beleaguered by the sullen hosts of winter, it withdraws into the impregnable fortress of its subterranean vitality and emerges upon the first solicitation of spring.

"Sown by the winds, by wandering birds, propagated by the subtle horticulture of the

elements which are its ministers and servants, it softens the rude outline of the world. It bears no blazonry of bloom to charm the senses with fragrance or splendor, but its homely hue is more enchanting than the lily or the rose. It yields no fruit in earth or air, yet, and should its harvest fail for a single year, famine would depopulate the world."

### **Keep ours a Land of Freedom**

Perhaps this is what will happen or be the result if another war comes and the atomic and hydrogen bombs are released on the world. Not only the people but nature's wonders of beautiful woodland, sages, marshes, meadows, fields of grain and the grasses will be ultimately destroyed. We must be serious about these thoughts for we could easily lose it all. However we also must be able to get along, and forget long enough to enjoy November's beauty and to remember what the years, the months the weeks and days hold for us, for summer is past, therefore soon we'll be to the Christmas songs and will bundle up considerable when out of doors we go.

We would do well if we could keep this good land, America, a land of riches, opportunity and freedom.

The first part of the good land - the good America - was over 200 years ago to be used as a site to establish a new colony. It is still practically without change because the people here or living here were more or less like the Hispano-Californians. They have been reluctant to change. Lots of people do not want change, for it is so primitive that it is a real pleasure for those that realize what freedom really is, yet perhaps selfish in a sort of way, not realizing the non-productive end.

We know and feel assured that "nothing can stop the gentle hand of progress" but since this part of America is to become part of the National Park Service, it will still remain in its infant form (except for people) as it was several hundred years ago. Therefore if the laws which are a part of progress, and result from increasing population and the variety of minds in our human element, do not become too stringent, then, and then only, can we ever hope to retain any part of that rich heritage with which we are so bountifully supplied, that is nature without change, freedom and a chance to stroll along the hunting paths to enjoy the crisp November days, free. A chance to meditate, on the other hand to reap the harvest of better things and better economical living, with the coming or advent of perhaps several small businesses and the ingress and egress of numerous people which will expand over the years. We would perhaps wish for the National Park Service.

### **Enter the Wildfowl**

November brings along the wild honkers, the black ducks, teal and a few other species such as the American widgeon or bald-pate, the bufflehead, brant and others that add spice to our days afield. Along the surf can be seen people casting for the red drum, and as we watch the excitement a young lady in fishing togs reels in a 30 or 40 pound drum. The sand whipped up by the north winds, like snow, sails along across the beach, over the high water mark and is deposited in the rolling sea.

As one rides along the beaches, birds like the willet, godwit, yellow-leg and other varieties feed as the sea rolls down. Along the openings or draws, on the sand rills or browsing on briar or bamboo, one can see cattle, which have been a part of this free country for years. In the woods and high marshes now the wild horse is also browsing on the briar leaves and other flora.

A cottontail scampers across the open space and enters our vision. Wild domestic cats, hunting birds or field mice, are occasionally seen creeping slowly along, fat, shiny and sleek in their winter coats.

A few sheep, the only remnants of a large flock, full of dirty wool, having not been sheared in ages, scamper in excitement across the foot hills as the hunter rounds a hill and jump shoots a dove. The dog gets the dove, delivers it to hand. The hunter pauses and wonders what the changes of the next few years will really bring. Along the reefs in the sound, visible to the hunter on the hill, is a haul seiner, or perhaps in the sea a shrimper or flounder fisherman dragging, or a menhaden porgy boat bailing menhaden from the seine. Again in the sound a box blind is discernable, set out, ready for the goose hunter. Across the hills are the serrated golden brown fronds of the sea oats, leaning over with the winds like sheaves of wheat. The close of the day brings a chill, the waters roughen, gulls fly toward their roosts. The shrimpers and the porgy boats and the seiners are sailing homeward with their catches. The hunter who has been blessed with the privilege of viewing all these wonders of the Outer Banks trudges homeward with perhaps a rabbit hanging on his strap, or his pocket bulging with birds in their season. Lights begin to flicker, the wind lulls, bringing a host of changes to make November more enchanting. November beauty along the Carolina Outer Banks is the fruit of all the things we see and picture above.

The Park Service may preserve this free way of life (insofar as the law will permit) and provide the general public, as well as the local residents, an opportunity to view and share a place that was first but yet last.

The sandy and boot-worn paths on the Banks villages will vouch for the Norwegian legend, "On the roads between the homes of friends, no grass grows."

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## There's Nothing Like the Glory of NOVEMBER ON THE "BANKS"

By Capt. Marvin W. Howard, Ocracoke, N. C.

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dom of the individual, that derives its powers from the bottom up rather than the top down. The four freedoms which were so respectively brought to the public by the late Franklin D. Roosevelt. These freedoms we enjoy in the good U. S. A. and now especially along the Outer Banks where thus far the land has never been posted to any great extent, therefore the hunter can stroll with his dog "beel-ing" or watching the "retriever" as the hunter kills a dove or other wild-life in season.

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## CELEBRATION IS PLANNED FOR DECEMBER 17TH

51st Anniversary of Flight To Be Observed at K. D. Hills

The 51st anniversary celebration of William and Oville's first successful powered flight at Kill Devil Hill will be observed at the site, and in the dining room of The Carolinian at Nags Head on December 17, next month, according to Miles L. Clark of Elizabeth City, chairman of the board of directors of the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Society, which will sponsor the celebration this year with the cooperation of the Air Force Association, the National Park Service and the North Carolina 50th Anniversary Commission created last year by the late Governor William B. Umstead.

"The observance which will pay homage to the aviation pioneers this year will not be on so elaborate a scale as last year," said Clark. "It will be of such importance however, that many nationally known correspondents for newspapers of the world are to fly here for the celebration."

Ralph V. Whitener, program director of the Air Force Association who spearheaded the international observance on the Dare coast at Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills and Nags Head last year, will meet with local members of the sponsoring society within the next few days to complete arrangements for the celebration.

## FREAK FIRE DAMAGES DRINKWATER COTTAGE

Certainly Burns Result of Intense Heat from Glass Ash Tray

Early morning sun rays magnified by a glass ash tray is believed to have been the cause of a fire Thursday which damaged the small cottages in the A. W.

## Trip to Ocracoke Interesting,





\* The "Four Freedoms" were goals articulated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on January 6, 1941 in his State of the Union address (also known as his "Four Freedoms Speech"). The four freedoms he sought for "everywhere in the world" were Freedom of Speech and Expression, Freedom of Worship, Freedom from Want, and Freedom from Fear. As I write, four framed posters depicting these freedoms hang in the hallway of the Sunday School rooms of the Ocracoke Methodist Church.

\*\* "In Praise of Blue Grass," an 1870s speech to the Kansas Senate by Senator John James Ingalls (1833-1900).