

Happy Thanksgiving from all of us at Village Craftsmen!

Last month I reported that one of the most common questions summer visitors ask us is, “What do you folks do here all winter?” I related that we often sit around after a family dinner or potluck, and retell some of the [amusing comments and questions that we’ve heard over the years](#).

Quite a bit more goes on here, as well. But mostly it involves local people just getting together to enjoy each other’s company. As you might imagine, this time of year there’s not much commercial “entertainment” put on for the tourist trade.

However, it may be that someone has come into a couple of bushels of fresh oysters. If we’re all lucky, they will invite friends over to sit around the dining room table (covered with newspapers, of course) to share jokes and stories while we shuck the slightly steamed delicacies, dip them in butter, and wash them down with cold beer.

On one warm November weekend Charles Temple organized a beach party to celebrate the “end of the season.” Several dozen Ocracokers (young, old, and children) gathered to laugh, play frisbee, throw a baseball, and eat hot dogs & hamburgers. As they say, “a good time was had by all.”

November Beach Party



Just before sunset we were all treated to the sight of a sun dog in the southwestern sky.

Autumn Sun Dog



We built a fire not too far from the surf, and, after the sun went down and the air cooled, we

sat in a circle roasting marshmallows and visiting long into the night.

Riley and the Beach Fire



Now and then I am fortunate enough to host a potluck for our local musicians. Sitting around the living room after dinner I relax while listening to familiar tunes played on guitar, banjo, fiddle and mandolin.

Ocrafolk Opry Performers at an Informal Jam Session:



Fiddler Dave and Miss Kitty Liven up my Living Room:



There is not much that is more rewarding than listening to friends strike up a tune for the pure pleasure of making music.

Many of us will be performing on Friday, November 29, for a local concert to benefit this upcoming year's "[Ocrafolk Festival of Story and Song](#)." Look for more information about this delightful festival that is held each year during the first weekend in June.

Of course, the benefit concert is the day after Thanksgiving, and many of us will have just gathered at Gary and Kitty's house for our annual Turkey Day get together. Dozens of people fill the Mitchells' home each year with casseroles, oysters, salads, homemade bread, cakes and pies — and the traditional turkey, stuffing, and gravy, of course. After dinner, we are usually treated to photography exhibits, music, or even storytelling. What a feast!

Recently I learned of an interesting after-dinner parlor game for a large group of friends. With a few slips of paper and a yen for fun you too can play Werewolf. Just last week nineteen islanders got together for a potluck dinner and several hours of this newly discovered game. It was loud and exciting, and once in a while the “villagers” were actually successful in routing the lycanthropic intruders from their midst. One of the winter joys of living on Ocracoke is the sense of community and the ease of getting a large group of folks together for an evening of good fun.

Last month I promised a report on the first ever Howard Family Reunion. Following is the article that appeared in our local newspaper, the “Ocracoke Observer:”

Howard Family Reunion

“Amateur genealogists are well known for seeking out the most noble and honorable members of their clans, although not a few actually revel in exposing the outrageous and colorful black sheep of the family. The Howard family is little different from other families, boasting a wide assortment of the goodly and a few of the ignoble.

William Howard (1700-1795), the progenitor of at least three major branches of this prominent Ocracoke family, can count among his descendents successful musicians, writers, health-care professionals, judges, and four-star generals. Nevertheless, William Howard himself, though possibly a rather well-to-do planter by 1759 when he purchased Ocracoke Island for 105 Pounds Sterling, may have been the very same William Howard who served as quartermaster to the infamous pirate Blackbeard in 1718. Or perhaps he was the grandson of the villainous buccaneer. We may never know.

In October, 2002, when the first Howard family reunion was held on the island, no fewer than 125 people descended on Ocracoke, from as far distant as New York, Arizona, and California. Julie Howard of Ocracoke prepared an extensive, wall-mounted family tree that documented the hundreds of descendants of William. Family members spent much time in front of the display identifying their branch of the tree, and penciling in the names of those not already included.

Family Members Trace Their Roots



Various members of the Howard clan placed books, photographs, and other memorabilia on view, while others shared information on their genealogical line. Earl O'Neal from the island presented an exhaustive account of his research on the Howards of Ocracoke. Members of the family will be looking forward to the publication of his book sometime in the next year or two.

Martin and Jule Garrish, both descendants of William Howard, and accomplished island musicians, provided entertainment on Saturday evening. Between sets, Philip Howard shared several stories about Ocracoke natives that illustrated their often not-so-straight-laced, and impish character. Nearly everyone laughed heartily and seemed delighted to know that the family included a number of folks who were a little earthy, and who didn't take themselves too seriously.

A highlight of the evening was a traditional Ocracoke square dance, complete with calls to "swing your partner," "wring your dishrag," "dance the star," and "fall in line for the march."

Howard Family Joins in a Traditional Ocracoke Squaredance



This reunion would not have happened without the dedication and enthusiasm of Teresa Howard Harrell and her extended family from Tarboro, NC. Teresa spent more than two years planning the event. She invested much energy and not a little bit of cash getting the word out, planning the food and decorations, and making sure everything ran as smoothly as possible.

Descendants of Homer & Aliph Howard Share a Meal



During the weekend many family connections were identified or renewed. Though little DNA may actually be shared by far-flung members from these various Howard branches, a meaningful bond was established among a wide assortment of people joined together by their relationship to their common ancestor, William Howard of Ocracoke. We can only conjecture that William would be delighted to know that his descendants have been so prolific, and that they are justly proud of their heritage.”

We hope this gives you a sense of life on Ocracoke in the wintertime. It’s quiet and there’s not much going on “out there,” but there’s plenty to keep us busy with family and good friends.

Again, we wish you all a very Happy Thanksgiving, and we will be back in touch next month.

Philip and the whole gang at Village Craftsmen (Dallie, Jude, Amy, Mary, and Leon)