

An aerial photograph of a coastal area, likely Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The image shows a large, irregularly shaped bay or inlet with a complex network of channels and marshes. The surrounding land is a mix of green vegetation and light-colored, possibly sandy or cleared areas. The ocean is visible on the right side, with a clear blue color gradient. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Final Technical Report - Volume One:  
Ethnohistorical Description of  
the Eight Villages Adjoining  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
and Interpretive Themes of  
History and Heritage

Cultural Resources  
Southeast Region



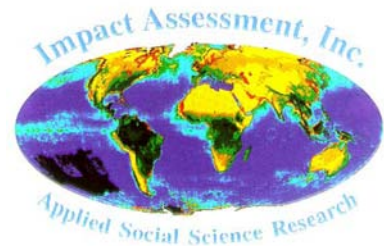
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**Final Technical Report – Volume One:  
Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages  
adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore and  
Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage**

**November 2005**



*prepared for*  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
1401 National Park Drive  
Manteo, NC 27954



*prepared by*  
Impact Assessment, Inc.  
2166 Avenida de la Playa, Suite F  
La Jolla, California 92037

*in fulfillment of*  
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About the cover: New Year's Eve 2003 was exceptionally warm and sunny over the Mid-Atlantic states. This image from the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) instrument on the Aqua satellite shows the Atlantic coast stretching from the Chesapeake Bay of Virginia to Winyah Bay of South Carolina. Albemarle and Pamlico sounds separate the long, thin islands of the Outer Banks from mainland North Carolina. *Image courtesy of NASA's Visible Earth, a catalog of NASA images and animations of our home planet found on the internet at <http://visibleearth.nasa.gov>.*

Signature Page

Final Technical Report  
An Ethnohistorical Description of the Eight Villages Adjoining  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
And  
Interpretive Themes of History and Heritage

Approved by: Michael B. Murray 1-27-06  
Superintendent Date  
Cape Hatteras National Seashore

Recommended by: J. Anthony Fadden 2-2-06  
Chief, Cultural Resources Division - ACTING Date  
Southeast Region

Recommended by: [Signature] 2-3-06  
Associate Regional Director, Cultural Resource Date  
Stewardship and Partnership, Southeast Region

Approved by: Patricia A. Hooks 2/3/06  
Regional Director, Southeast Region Date

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## 2. Executive Summary

This document results from a three-year long research project funded by the National Park Service beginning in 2002 to conduct an ethnohistorical and ethnographic study of eight communities adjacent to the Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA). This study grew out of the National Park Service's recognition of the importance of understanding the social, cultural, and economic histories of communities affected by its policies and actions; its purpose was to "support the Park in the interpretation of its cultural resources, stewardship of ethnographic sources within the Park, and in community relations with these Park neighbors."

Research methods included participant-observation in Hatteras and Ocracoke villages, social mapping, genealogical interviews, and extended, tape-recorded interviews of community elders and leaders. We also built upon interviews of residents who born before or near the turn of the century that were recorded in the 1970s and 1980s by National Park Service staff as part of the University of North Carolina's Southern Oral History Project. In some cases we were able to interview the children of those interviewed in earlier decades, now deceased. These interviews helped us formulate a diachronic description of social and cultural change in Outer Bank villages, particularly relating to the interpretive themes of Cape Hatteras National Seashore: seashore living and fishing economy.

The final document is divided into three main components:

- A description of contemporary life on the Outer Banks, including demographic changes, challenges and issues faced by traditional banker communities, and a discussion of the role of the National Park Service in villager life (Chapter 6). This section includes a discussion of management issues and recommendations.
- An ethnohistorical description of the eight villages adjoining Cape Hatteras National Seashore: Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo, Avon, Buxton, Frisco, Hatteras, and Ocracoke. This is the main body of the text, and includes an overall history of Hatteras and

Ocracoke Islands (Chapter 5), as well as specific ethnohistories of the six other villages (Chapter 7), and is based primarily on recorded interviews.

- Interpretive themes of history and heritage. This section offers information pertaining to ten interpretive themes identified by National Park Service staff. The purpose of this section is to provide a reference guide for Park interpreters who are developing programs about the cultural meanings of artifacts, places, or events in Banker history. We have included as much primary source information for each of these themes as possible, and included secondary source references as well.

In addition to the main document described above, we have compiled the oral histories recorded and transcribed for this project in a separate document. These interviews will be made available to National Park personnel as well as the public. They should be studied in conjunction with the interviews from the 1970s and 1980s conducted by National Park staff and Southern Oral History Project researchers. These interviews are file at the History Center in Manteo, and at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore headquarters in Manteo. Also useful to any research of Outer Banks culture and history is an annotated bibliography of coastal research compiled by Betty Duggan (2001), which was undertaken as a precursor to this project.

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#### 4.0. Introduction

In collecting interviews for an ethnohistory of the Outer Banks—that is, a history through the eyes and memories of community members—we found that Hatteras and Ocracoke Islanders did not necessarily relish a lot of questions, particularly from strangers working on a project for the federal government. Fortunately, however, this reluctance was counterbalanced with hospitality, curiosity, and humor.

Islanders are sorely aware of the pressures brought to bear on their communities, and have eloquently and gruffly expressed their concerns at county commission meetings, community planning sessions, fisheries hearings, National Park Service meetings, in letters and editorials to newspapers, and internet chat rooms. Although some people politely declined to speak to us, many took the time to patiently answer our questions and share thoughts and stories above and beyond what we asked. Some wondered why we would be interested in talking to them, and others seemed to recognize that their place on these fast-changing islands could become as invisible as an unmarked grave if not recorded.

Ocracoke and Hatteras Islanders have a long track-record of graciously hosting off-island visitors who have frequented the Banks since the late 1800s to hunt, fish, bathe, and rest. They have exchanged information and stories with these visitors; they also have a history of traveling off-island for work, school, and military service. So, today's tendency to be reclusive during the tourist season or to express fatigue at yet another request for information is not necessarily part of the "island character" or a tradition of reticence. Rather, it is more an outgrowth of living in an overwhelmingly crowded and expensive tourist-destination replete with an ever-increasing barrage of rules, restrictions, and managers. Perhaps for this very reason people were willing to

sit down and describe a different life that they once knew, a different community that they helped shape, and a different quality of culture on the Banks.

#### **4.1. Background**

The Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA) represents the middle and farthest-flung boundary of the 172-mile Outer Banks region of North Carolina. Arcing out into the Atlantic Ocean some 30 miles from the mainland, the barrier islands of Hatteras and Ocracoke appear impossibly narrow and vulnerable. Yet, the region has long supported inhabitants; first American Indians, then English settlers. Today, descendants of early settlers continue to live and work on the Banks, but share the sandy spit with a staggering number of tourists, second-home vacationers/investors, urban expatriates, and laborers imported from other countries.

Since the 1953 establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the nation's first national seashore park, the National Park Service has come to be neighbor, friend, and nemesis to residents of Hatteras and Ocracoke. On the one hand, Bankers are thankful that the federal government has protected much of Hatteras and Ocracoke from commercial development. On the other hand, they resent some of the management policies and practices that the Park Service has imposed on their lives. Nevertheless, the historic sites, artifacts, and natural areas that the Park Service maintains are of deep symbolic significance to the villagers and provide tangible links to their not-too-distant past.

In 2001, the National Park Service, describing the eight villages as “living exponents of the human history and maritime cultures” of Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands, called for an ethnographic and ethnohistorical study to better understand the neighboring communities along the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. A primary intent of this research is to “support the park in

the interpretation of its cultural resources, stewardship of ethnographic sources within the park, and in community relations with these park neighbors.” Information collected for this research will help preserve the past and document the dynamic, changing culture that is an outgrowth of that past. Better integration of ethnographic data with the cultural interpretation of sites and artifacts will result in a “living history” that is inclusive of modern day villagers. A deeper understanding of and appreciation for the cultural resources of Hatteras and Ocracoke should also help improve relations between the Park and Bank dwellers.

#### **4.2. Goals and Objectives**

One goal of this research was to collect information and materials that would contribute to the existing inventory of oral histories, interviews, photographs, and maps pertaining to the culture and history of the eight villages adjoining the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. This information enables us to establish a baseline characterization of island life before major transformations began taking place, so that triggers of change at various points in history could be identified and traced in relation to present day communities.

Another goal of this project was to develop a diachronic description of social and cultural change, particularly pertaining to the interpretive theme of “seashore living and a fishing economy.” There is, of course, no such thing as a static period of time, and the curve of social transformation is dramatically steeper at some points than others. For example, the establishment of a paved road and bridge connecting Hatteras Island to the mainland brought about a faster-paced life and numerous other changes for islanders. The cyclical nature of various fisheries has an impact on island life, as do major fisheries policy shifts. Among features

that remain constant is the region's vulnerability to "Mother Nature," including Hurricane Isabel which devastated Hatteras village in 2003.

Considering the level of tourism, real estate sales, and development today, the primary question that has emerged from this project is this: at what point do communities lose the ability to maintain their cohesiveness and distinctiveness? Before this question can be addressed, numerous other questions must be asked such as: what defines a community? What holds a community together? Are the social and economic forces changing the nature of Outer Banks life undermining traditional communities, helping maintain them, or both? Are community and village boundaries the same? What does a community display, and what does it hide? What is turned into a commodity to be sold, and what is protected at all costs? Is it possible to define and describe an Outer Banks culture?

#### **4.3. Methods**

The collection of oral histories and interviews from January of 2002 to May of 2004 was central to this project. Researchers interviewed long-term island residents who had memories of Hatteras or Ocracoke before the National Seashore was established in order to examine the contrast before and after the arrival of the Park. We were also interested in the transition period when the concept of a National Seashore was introduced and villagers relinquished control and ownership of property to the government. Although interviews were loosely structured, the following prompts were used:

- Could you tell me about your family history? (Where/when born, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, children, occupations, etc.);
- What was your experience growing up here? (School, church, revivals, baptisms, funerals, weddings, pastime for kids and teens, games/ toys, travel off island/between villages, home



remedies, meals, chores, dating, jobs, neighbors, stores, storms, house, gardens, pets, livestock, cars, boats);

- Are there particular members of the community who stand out in your mind as you were growing up? (Teachers, preachers, midwives, doctors, lifesavers, musicians, community leaders, firemen, counselors, etc.);
- Do you remember any industries or businesses that are no longer here? (Salvaging, boatbuilding, yaupon tea, seaweed harvesting, styles of fishing);
- Can you describe the activities or work that have stood the test of time and are still practiced? (Fishing, hunting guides, visiting, gardening, etc.);
- What did the village and the surrounding area look like when you were growing up? (Village size and layout, roads, trees, dunes, etc.);
- What was/is the relationship of this village to the other villages of Hatteras Island and Ocracoke? (Dependencies, rivalries, trade, rituals, etc.);
- How is this village different from surrounding villages, and how is it similar? (What “sets it off,” makes it unique, and what do villages have in common?);
- What kind of things have brought change to the way of life in this village and *how* has it changed village life? (Transportation, electricity/water, telephone, cable, internet, fishing regulations, alcohol, drugs, money, tourism);
- What “watershed” events most affected village life, and how? (Women’s vote, Depression, WWII, Civil Rights, establishment of the Park);
- What features of this area have special meaning to you? (e.g., family burials, homeplace, remnants of the past, gathering places, swim holes, harbor).

We recorded most of the interviews, and paid repeat visits to many of the islanders. We also undertook informal, non-recorded interviews. We used the method of participant-observation during fieldwork, accompanying fishermen, attending festivals and community events, and observing public fisheries hearings and meetings. Villagers helped us map out the local names of small creeks, sloughs, cuts, and islands. We did aerial surveys of the region with local pilots. We photographed residents, homes, graves, hurricane-damaged areas, and artifacts. We also incorporated Census records, land use plans, and other secondary sources to provide a demographic history of the Hatteras and Ocracoke island communities.

#### **4.4. Organization of Ethnohistories and Interpretive Themes**

The following ethnohistories are organized as if one were traveling down the Banks north to south: from Rodanthe to Ocracoke. They are based first and foremost on oral histories gathered during the course of this project, those gathered in 1988 by University of North Carolina's Southern Oral History Project, and a variety of interviews undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s by Park Service personnel. The categories within each ethnohistory (e.g., "early trade," "church," "perceptions of the environment," "pastimes") emerged from the topics addressed in the interviews.

A major challenge in writing these ethnohistories was avoiding redundancy from village to village. In some respects we are describing eight versions of the same story. Yet, each village is unique in the particular families and individuals making up the community, and the particular experiences and stories they tell. For example, all eight communities have a history of waterfowl hunting, fishing, meeting the mail boat, and so on. But, we focused on details such as who met

the mail boat, where particular villagers hunted, and how the community's location shaped how fishermen went about their work.

We prefaced the ethnohistories with a historical and modern overview of Hatteras and Ocracoke to provide a framework and context for the eight village descriptions. Although oral histories were central to the village ethnographies, we rounded them out with other sources where needed, including informal interviews, scholarly publications, and newspaper articles. Participant-observation allowed us to experience first-hand many of the observations made in interviews; this method serves, when possible, as a check for interview validity. Indispensable to any study of the Outer Banks is the work of David Stick, Gary Dunbar, Roger Payne, Alton Ballance, Danny Couch, Nancy Van Dolsen, and Walt Wolfram/ Natalie Shilling-Estes.

The National Park Service headquarters for the Cape Hatteras National Seashore in Manteo provided the ethnographic team with several interpretive themes (Chapter Seven) to explore. These themes were then developed for the purpose of providing informational and reference materials to Park Service interpreters who wish to create presentations, displays, demonstrations, or other such interpretive programs for Park visitors.

## 5.0. History of Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands

### 5.1. The Colonial Period: Stockmen Beginnings

The first written account of the Outer Banks was by Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano in 1524. Verrazzano, navigator for a French expedition, famously mistook Pamlico Sound for the Pacific Ocean (“oriental sea”), separated from the Atlantic only by a thin strip of sandy bank; Europeans accepted this as fact for the next 150 years (Stick 1958). Verrazzano anchored off what was likely Hatteras Island and deployed a boat of 25 men in search of fresh water. When a “large number of native people” appeared on the beach to meet them, the crew stopped short of the surf and sent a man to shore to offer trinkets (ibid, 12). The man tossed the gifts toward the natives and attempted to swim back to the boat, but the surf sent him tumbling to the beach repeatedly. The Indians hauled him to dry sand, built a fire, removed his clothes, and examined his white skin. When the sailor recovered his strength, the natives hugged him and sent him back into the surf where he successfully joined his companions (Stick 1958).

Sir Walter Raleigh of England organized three expeditions to the Banks region in the mid-1580s in search of a prime site for settlement. A group of English men, women, and children settled on Roanoke Island in 1587. The settlers sent one ship back with Governor John White to England for supplies, but White was unable to return to Roanoke Island until 1590 because of England’s war with Spain. Upon his return, the fort was in disarray, and there was no sign of the settlers or their bodies; just “CRO” and “CROATOAN” carved in two trees. The fate of the “lost colony” was unknown; John White speculated that they joined the “friendly Indians at Croatoan, now Hatteras Island,” but this and later theories have never been substantiated (Stick 1958, 20).

Legend has it that the first white settlers on the Outer Banks were castaways, cutthroats, pirates, and wreckers. Although the region's inaccessibility due to treacherous waters and shoals made it ideal for those seeking a hideout, early settlers were stockmen and small landholders, the great majority of whom were "poor but respectable yeoman who saw an opportunity to acquire, generally for the taking, land for a homestead" (Dunbar 1956, 39) and who were "trying to gain a foothold in the new colony" (Stick 1958, 24):

Their habitations were almost invariably situated in the wooded hammocks on the sound side, where they could find building sites in close proximity to the sloughs and creeks in which their boats were kept and where they were protected from the strong winds on the back of the beach and the high tides which periodically flooded the marsh (Stick 1958, 24-25).

The earliest recorded mention of livestock on the Banks was a 1710 petition to settle stock near Ocracoke Inlet. The island was owned by Richard Sanderson of Perquimans County who bequeathed "Ye Island of Ocrecock, with all the stock of horses, sheep, cattle, and hogs" to his son in 1733 (Dunbar 1956, 38). By 1722 much of the Outer Banks had been granted to or claimed by noblemen, squatters, ranchers, and investors:

The land grants on the Banks during the colonial period were often very large, necessarily so for the purpose of stock raising...it should be remembered that the ownership represented by grants and deeds did not always mean control or occupation of the land. Presumably many of the early settlers acquired their property merely by settling on it (Dunbar 1956, 39).

Settlers from Virginia or the North Carolina mainland made their home in the hummocks on the Sound side of the Banks, protected from the ocean winds and seas (Dunbar 1956, 40). They lived in small, scattered settlements with large, fenced gardens and free-ranging livestock. Settlers supplemented their living with subsistence fishing and waterfowl hunting as well as shoreline scavenging (ibid). They built windmills in the 1720s for grinding corn, obtained from plantations in areas such as Stumpy Point, in exchange for fresh fish, salted fish, and oysters

(Stick 1958; Wechter 1975). They also built fish camps along the ocean beach and hunting blinds along marshes. They built one and a half or two story houses, one room deep “with outside end chimneys and a central hallway” typical of the mid-Atlantic style of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Dunbar 1956, 40-41).

During the early 1700s, a small group of about 80 Indians lived in the Cape Woods along the Sound, and were likely of the same Hatteras or Hatterask culture encountered by Verrazanno’s expedition 200 years earlier. The Hatteras Indians were part of the Croatan Chiefdom, classified as northern coastal Algonkian-speakers (Ward and Davis 1999, 194). The archaeological record suggests that the Hatteras had the only permanent settlements on the Island during this period, compared to the temporary hunting and fishing camps of the Coree and Machapungas along the Banks. But the Hatteras Indians did not fare well with the newcomers to the Banks, and by 1715 were described as being “in great poverty” (Dunbar 1956, 40). In 1733 a cartographer reported that there were “6 or 8 (Indians) at Hatteras, who dwell among the English” (Dunbar 1956, 40). Mixed-blood individuals of European and Native American stock were known as “Mustees.”

Early settlers took part in subsistence fishing as well as limited commercial fishing, trading salted fish for corn to mainland plantations. Whaling developed on Core Banks and Shackleford Banks to the south after the Lords Proprietors tried to induce “New England whalers to settle in the province” (Stick 1958, 33). But whales were “not the object of a boat fishery” on Hatteras and Ocracoke. Bankers did, however, butcher and dry whales and dolphins that were “cast on shore” (Dunbar 1956:, 41). They also “[availed] themselves of the timbers and cargoes of wrecked ships,” not considering it stealing but rather as making use of that which was unclaimed (ibid, 55). Their reputation as “wreckers or land pirates” who lured ships to ruin and

robbed them of cargo is the result of fanciful imagination, exaggeration, and is wholly undeserved (Dunbar 1956, 42).

Ocracoke Inlet became an official port of entry to Bath Town in 1715. Ocracoke village, originally mapped as Pilot Town, was officially settled around 1743 by British government workers assigned the duty of piloting vessels through the strategically important inlet (Stick 1958; Payne 1985). Both Ocracoke and Portsmouth, the largest towns of the period, served as gateway outposts for trade to mainland communities. The practice of “lightering,” or transferring cargo to shallow draft boats, enabled goods to be shipped across Pamlico Sound to river towns such as Washington, New Bern, or Edenton (Dunbar 1956). Lightering made smuggling easier, as it enabled pilots to offload goods in small settlements, thereby avoiding customs fees charged at the ports of Bath, Edenton, and Currituck (Dunbar 1956, 45).

Piracy became prevalent off the North Carolina coast in the early 1700s, reaching its heyday with the exploits of Edward Teach or “Blackbeard.” Teach enjoyed the seclusion of the North Carolina’s islands, estuaries and rivers. He commandeered a fleet of four vessels and a crew of some 400 pirates. His operation was responsible for the capture of twenty-five ships between 1716 and 1718. In autumn of 1718, after receiving a pardon from the royal Governor Eden in Bath, Teach "found" a French ship and divided the booty with Governor Eden and Government Secretary Tobias Knight. Outraged Carolinians turned to Virginia Governor Alexander Spotswood for help, and he responded by dispatching two British warships. Robert Maynard’s crew engaged Teach’s crew on the *Adventure* in battle at Ocracoke Inlet November 22, 1718; the subsequent death of Blackbeard marked the end of piracy’s short-lived golden age in North Carolina (Stick 1958).

The Banks remained relatively peaceful until 1741 when England and Spain went to war. A Spanish tent town was erected on Ocracoke, and Spaniards harassed passing vessels, burned houses, and killed cattle. Conflicts with Spaniards continued in various forms until Tarheels (North Carolinians) petitioned for fortification along coast. “All the sea banks (are) covered with cattle, sheep, and hogs,” a writer observed in 1776, expressing the concern that British vessels would find a ready supply of fresh meat during the Revolutionary War (Dunbar 1956, 43). On April 14, 1776, warfare came to the Banks when the armed British sloop *Lilly* crossed Ocracoke Bar and approached the merchant schooner *Polly*. *Lilly’s* crew, along with those of its sister ship *Fincastle*, captured and looted the *Polly* in front of Ocracoke pilots. Before daybreak, the *Fincastle* weighed anchor and went to sea. But the Ocracoke pilots rowed out to the *Lilly* and took the captain and crew prisoner. They transferred the British gang to Edenton where they were tried and found guilty.

Recognizing the vulnerability of inlets, the North Carolina Provincial Congress approved the establishment of five independent companies of troops up and down the coast. British raids continued near Ocracoke Inlet, however, until the Ocracoke Militia Company was formed from 1779-1783; Bankers recognized that they could most effectively protect the inlet (Stick 1958). Islanders willingly signed up for militia duty, but were exempt from having to serve in distant expeditions because of the likelihood of a local raid (Dunbar 1956). Ocracoke Inlet was the passageway of much North Carolina and Virginia trade, and its security was a top priority.

Hatteras Inlet was too shallow to be of any importance, and filled completely by 1755, joining Ocracoke and Hatteras Islands to comprise one long bank. An Ocracoke Inlet pilot lived in Hatteras Village and walked to work after the Inlet was filled. The Hatteras Inlet was reopened by a hurricane in the fall of 1846 (Stick 1958, 296).



“Settlement sites...in Colonial days were the same as those of the present,” wrote geographer Gary Dunbar (1956, 47), “wooded hammocks on the sound side.” Dunbar challenged the notion that the Banks were covered from end to end in thick forest, maintaining that stumps exposed by storms along the beach at Chicamacomico indicate that the beach once lay further to the east, not that trees once grew on the beach (Dunbar 1956, 64). “A ‘beach forest’... cannot exist because wind-borne salt spray would prevent it” (ibid). He also questions claims that livestock denuded forest and vegetation, as well as the idea that Bankers themselves deforested the area. A 1795 description supports his contention that the Banks were never carpeted in forest:

The coast (beach) from Occacock to Cape Hatteras is sandy and barren...Cape Hatteras and the land from it toward Occacock, to the distance of about thirteen miles, are covered with large evergreen trees, such as live oak, pine and cedar. Here are three large and remarkable sand hills, called Stowe’s (present Styron) Hills. The coast afterward is a bald beach, interspersed with a few low sand hills; about eleven miles farther is a group of trees, called the Six Mile Hammock, from its distance from Occacock – from thence the coast is quite barren and sandy (Dunbar 1956, 63-64).

#### **4.2. The Federal Period (1780 to 1865): Shipwrecks and War**

About 1,000 people were living on the Banks by the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783 and the last reference to the Hatteras Indians was in a 1788 deed from “‘Mary Elks, Inden, of Hatteras Banks’ to Nathan Midyett for a track of land which included the site of the old Indian town” (Stick 1958, 73). After Independence “there was a brisk trade in Outer Banks real estate” (ibid: 74). Slave ownership was minimal but present (Stick 1958). Although larger Ocracoke landowners, like those of Hatteras Island, owned slaves, “racial boundaries were confused on the Outer Banks, where islanders...heeded the less rigid racial mores of shipboard life more than those of tidewater plantations or inland ports” (Cecelski 2001, 50). Records indicate that

children of free black William Meekins owned 140 acres at Cape Hatteras and 50 acres at “Kinnakeet Banks” in the late 1700s (Cecelski 2001, 238).

After Independence, ship traffic grew along the Atlantic seaboard. Federal authorities, alarmed at the growing number of shipwrecks off the Outer Banks, authorized the first lighthouses in 1794, including Cape Hatteras in Buxton and Shell Castle Island in Ocracoke. The Ocracoke Shell Castle Island lighthouse was built on a spit of oyster shells and put into use in 1798. The Shell Castle light became useless when the channel shifted away, so in 1820 Congress appropriated \$14,000 to replace it with a lightship. In 1822 \$20,000 dollars was approved to build the present day 65 foot-high lighthouse in Ocracoke (Cecelski 2001, 303).

Cape Hatteras lighthouse was built near Buxton and put into operation by 1802. It was 120 feet in length from its underground stone foundation to the dome roof. Shipwrecks continued to occur, however, and ship captains complained about the dimness and low visibility of the light. In 1852 a newly formed Lighthouse Board reported criticisms that Cape Hatteras was "a disgrace to our country" and represented the "most important" and "worst light in the world" (Stick 1958, 186; 289). Congress appropriated 15,000 dollars to fit the lighthouse with a new lens and lantern, and to elevate the structure to 150 feet, a task which was completed in 1854. A Buxton resident recalled that the light was “a beautiful lamp, made up of twenty-four beautiful prisms,” (Toth et al. 1973, 47). He also recalled that the last keeper of the old light was Junius Jennette, who had to “pull five gallons of kerosene up to the top” (ibid).

“Vendues,” or “wreck auctions,” were formalized in 1801. The North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill that established wreck commissioners and wreck districts (Dunbar 1956). Coastal counties were directed to appoint two or more “discreet and proper persons” as commissioners, who would “collect as many men as necessary to go to the assistance of vessels

in distress and to take custody of the vessels and goods until reasonable rewards were paid to the salvors by the owner of the vessel or by the merchant whose goods were saved” (ibid, 70). The vendue or public sale was held if goods went “unclaimed for a year” (Dunbar 1956, 70).

Interested parties would come from mainland areas to vendues, and Bankers also participated in the bidding. Money from the sales was deposited with the county clerk of court. Anyone finding “stranded property” had to report it to the commissioner, and hiding stranded property resulted in a fine equal or double the value of the goods (ibid). A crooked wreck commissioner could be fined three times the value of the goods; thus, there was more incentive for islanders to get paid to be a salver or to bid on cheap items than to abscond with cargo (Dunbar 1956).

“The economy of the Bankers in the Federal period was not vastly different from that of colonial times,” concluded Dunbar, “the great changes were to come after the Civil War” (1956, 70). By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century there were about eight windmills for grinding corn on Hatteras Island and three on Ocracoke, a number that prompted a visitor to remark “There are greater number than I supposed were in existence in the whole county” (Dunbar 1956, 73). They included “Howard’s Windmill” on Ocracoke, two windmills in Hatteras, “Jennet’s Mill” in Buxton, two in Avon, two in Waves and one in Rodanthe (Dunbar 1956, 98). They were the “post mill” or German style where the relatively small and short body of the mill was “pushed round by hand to face the wind by means of a tail pole” (Dunbar 1956, 99). By 1904 only Avon had a mill still in service.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the Civil War period Bankers collected and prepared yaupon, a wild holly, for tea. During the War, yaupon tea enjoyed widespread popularity as a substitute for hard-to-find coffee. Some Frisco residents were able to market their yaupon to the mainland. After the war yaupon tea-drinking declined sharply, and those who made and drank it

“were looked down upon as people who could not afford imported tea” (Dunbar 1956, 102). Dunbar points out those occupations requiring little effort, or that depend on the gathering of easy-to-find materials such as yaupon bushes, tend to have low status: “People tend to look down upon those who make a business of gathering and selling any item which can be so easily procured” (Dunbar 1956, 102).

Bankers were renowned for their ambivalent allegiances during the Civil War, and were called “opportunists” by Confederate troops who complained that they raised white flags to the “house-tops on the approach of either Confederates or Federals” (Stick 1958, 155). If anything Bankers expressed Union leanings, given their seafaring history and the key role the federal government had played in establishing lighthouses and forts. “Bankers could not have much sympathy with the revolt against a government which had been their constant friend,” wrote a Union officer (cited in Stick 1958, 155).

Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands fell under Federal control early in the war. Although Ocracoke Inlet was, by 1861, less strategic than Hatteras Inlet, a small regiment of Confederate troops that manned Fort Ocracoke on Beacon Island protected it. But, federal forces blocked the Inlet by sinking schooners in 1861, and went on to establish a regiment at Live Oak Camp in Chicamacomico. Confederates later attacked this position; chasing Union troops southward on foot down the beach to Cape Hatteras. The Rebels, noting that the whole community of Chicamacomico did not rejoice at Confederate arrival but abandoned their homes and fled after Union troops, took this as evidence that Bankers were loyal to the Union. The next day, federal reinforcements arrived and drove the Confederates back up the Banks again - this event thus became known as the “Chicamacomico Races.” Fort Hatteras and Fort Clark at Hatteras Inlet

had suffered bombardment from four Union ships and were captured as well, securing the region under Union command (Stick 1958, 117-136).

Under Federal occupation some 1,200 people lived on Hatteras Island including almost 100 slaves (Stick 1958, 154). Within ten days of Union forces landing, “nearly all of the male adults had taken the oath of allegiance” to the United States. A visiting preacher found congregations along the island to be half “National soldiers” and half “natives of North Carolina” (ibid, 156). Anti-secessionists charged North Carolina leaders with treason in decreeing secession. Following a convention on Hatteras Island, North Carolina leaders set up a provisional government declaring Hatteras to be the capital North Carolina. The provisional Governor, a Hatteras preacher, called for elections in the Second Congressional District, whereby Charles Henry Foster of Hatteras was elected to the House of Representatives. In Washington, D.C., the case of Foster was referred to a committee on elections and declared invalid (Stick 1958, 157-158).

The Bankers’ allegiance to the federal government alienated them from mainland trading partners: “their market for fish...was cut off, and they no longer had the buying power - or more accurately, the trading power – to secure corn and other foodstuffs across the sound” (Stick 1958, 159). They managed to find employment tending to the needs of soldiers, however, as well as addressing a shortage of tea with yaupon production, and had no need for offers of charity from Yankee benefactors. Upon the war’s end, Hatteras and Ocracoke villagers had “little difficulty adjusting to the new order,” as there had been “little slave ownership on the Banks before the war” (Stick 1958, 166).

### 4.3. Modernization (Post Civil War – Post World War II)

As outsiders came into contact with Outer Banks communities, the villagers gained a reputation for their idiosyncrasies and independence. A Confederate officer had complained that islanders “mingle but little with the world; apparently indifferent to this outside sphere, they constitute a world within themselves” (Stick 1958, 155). Another observer characterized Bankers as “Queer folks (who)...get their living by fishing, gathering oysters, wrecking, and piloting. Most of them were born here, never saw another locality and all are happy” (ibid). Bankers were indeed happy during Reconstruction, as the Federal Government “was preparing to distribute the first in...a steady flow of vouchers and pay checks” for jobs in “new lighthouses, lifesaving stations, weather stations, and post offices” (Stick 1958, 168). It was “as if the Bankers were being rewarded for their wartime loyalty with steady jobs” (Stick 1958, 168).

The U.S. Lifesaving Service built seven lifesaving stations along North Carolina's coast by 1875, including one at Chicamacomico and Little Kinnakeet, adding more government jobs for barrier island villagers. Station keepers were paid \$200 dollars a year to supervise six surfmen during a December through March duty. The men, receiving \$40 dollars a month and \$3 dollars per shipwreck, slept six in one room in small wooden stations. They manned watchtowers in search of foundering vessels or flares, and took shifts walking the beach 24 hours a day, meeting Surfmen from neighboring stations and exchanging tokens to prove that the full beat was covered (Stick 1958).

During the winter of 1877-78, an astounding 188 shipwreck victims and Surfmen died within a 30 mile stretch of northern beach, including victims on the *USS Huron*, which foundered off Nags Head in late November near a lifesaving station that had not yet opened for the season. This tragedy compelled Congress to authorize eleven more stations; by 1879 Creeds

Hill near Frisco, Durants in Hatteras, Big Kinnakeet south of Avon, and Gull Shoal south of Salvo were in operation. By 1883, the New Inlet (Pea Island), Cape Hatteras, Ocracoke (Hatteras Inlet) and Ocracoke Villages stations were working. A seventh man was added to each crew, and the season was extended from September to April. The number of deaths due to shipwrecks declined, and the status of the Lifesaving Station Keepers grew.

The presence of the Lifesaving Stations, which became the U.S. Coast Guard stations in 1915, was socially, culturally and economically significant in the everyday lives of the Bankers. In addition to rescue missions, the Lifesaving Stations provided government jobs for islanders, infusing the Banks with steady income. The Lifesaving/Coast Guard system rotated Banker families to far-flung places as well as providing local employment. The stations served as “safe houses” for islanders traveling up and down the beach; the servicemen could be counted on to provide food, water, and sometimes transportation. The Stations also assisted Bankers with emergency communications and medical assistance. The Service formed an integral part of local politics, as men vied for the coveted position of “Surfman.” To be a member of the service was to enjoy a certain status above those without steady paychecks, such as the typical “Jack of All Trades” Banker who fished, market hunted, guided sportsmen and/or did carpentry. Such status was expressed not so much in terms of material wealth, but in terms of local influence and a certain worldly air gained from off-island tours of duty. Lighthouse keepers at Ocracoke and Buxton enjoyed similar status, as well as the men who served on Lightships.

Post offices were established around the turn of the century, formalizing a new name for many villages and improving communications. In addition to the pre-Civil War postal facilities at Ocracoke (1840) and Hatteras Village (1858), new stops were added in Rodanthe (1874), Buxton (1882), Avon (1883), Frisco (1889), Salvo (1901), and Waves (1939). Mail boat routes

were lengthened and improved upon to accommodate the needs of Bankers villages; the Ocracoke route started in Morehead City, Carteret County, and the Hatteras Island route came from Manteo. Freight boat routes to Ocracoke came from Little Washington, Belhaven, or New Bern, and the Hatteras Island freight was run from Washington or Elizabeth City and Edenton. Dozens of small family-run stores were established, as were “tourist homes” or hotels to accommodate salesmen, visitors, and sportsmen. The Outer Banks was considered prime waterfowl territory by 1900, and sportsmen traveled from New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia to take advantage of the rafts of waterfowl that wintered over in Pamlico Sound, and islanders carved decoys out of shipwreck debris and discarded lifesaving station telephone poles (Wechter 1975).

New public schools were built throughout the region as well. These schools incurred an increased demand for teachers.

Turn of the century innovations were close to home for Outer Bankers, including the Wright Brother’s first flight at Kill Devil Hills in 1903, and Thomas Edison’s staff member Reginald Fessenden’s successful transmission of a wireless message from Buxton to Roanoke Island in 1901 (Stick 1958,180). General Billy Mitchell proved the effectiveness of aerial bombing by sinking two obsolete battleships off Diamond Shoals in 1923 (ibid, 295-96). The Coast Guard stations were the first to get wired for telephone service, and stores and fish houses were the first to get electricity (early 1930s) in the form of gas-powered Delco Light Plant generators. Automobiles appeared in the 1920s, long before paved roads, and sail skiffs began losing out to “gas boats” with the influence, money, and demands of wealthy Yankee sportsmen in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Pre-World War II occupations besides government jobs, storekeepers, and freight boat operators included commercial fishermen, eel grass harvesters,



teachers, preachers, carpenters, cannery workers, hunting guides, and housekeepers at hotels and lodges; many residents were employed in a combination of such jobs. Some islanders who had left the region in search of work during the economically stagnant 1920s returned during the Depression, knowing that they could eke out a living on the water. The “cattle tick wars” of 1921-26, requiring all free-ranging livestock to be dipped in a toxic solution, added a bit of excitement to the Banks as folks rounded up unruly herds and ran them through “dipping vats” every two weeks or so. This gave way to state legislation passed in 1935 outlawing free range stock – unpenned animals were shot for a bounty of five dollars per head (Stick 1958). Ocracoke resisted such restrictions, but eventually succumbed before the laying of the highway.

Harbor and canal dredging projects both assisted Bankers and diminished the importance of Ocracoke and Hatteras Inlets: the dredging of harbors in Ocracoke (1931), Hatteras (1936), Rodanthe (1936-37), and Avon (1946) was beneficial to fishermen; but the decision to build the Intracoastal Waterway “from Beaufort Inlet to Chesapeake Bay killed all hopes of again making Ocracoke Inlet or Hatteras Inlet major ports of entry” (Stick 1958, 183).

“A Coastal Park for North Carolina” was the headline of the *Elizabeth City Independent* on July 21, 1933 advocating the rehabilitation and preservation of the Outer Banks environment. Rehabilitation plans gained momentum after a hurricane destroyed roads and houses along the northern banks, and by 1934 the Civilian Works Administration committed funds for the project. Four non-resident owners, J.S. Phipps, J.H. Phipps, Winston Guest, and Bradley Martin, donated 999 acres surrounding the Cape Hatteras lighthouse for the proposed park. The state General Assembly prohibited stock from grazing freely on the banks, which aided in grass planting and dune building. The National Park Service joined in restoration efforts, and recommended the

establishment of the Cape Hatteras Seashore, which was passed by federal legislation in 1937 (Stick 1958, 183).

All restoration efforts came to a halt in 1941, as World War II made dune stabilization seem trivial. Travel and tourism were curtailed, and Bankers by the hundreds enlisted in the armed forces. Villagers who did not serve overseas spent time scanning the coast and closing their curtains for fear of providing illumination to Nazi U-Boats so successful at picking off U.S. warships; more than 60 boats were sunk off the Banks.

During World War II, oil companies began buying up mineral rights off the Outer Banks. By the war's end, islanders who had initially supported the establishment of a National Park during the Depression because of the potential for increased employment opportunities favored instead bringing in the oil industry. Oil companies, however, soon moved on after exploration efforts were not productive. Bankers enjoyed a post-war tourism boom, and property owners tended to maintain their opposition to the Park. But, in 1952 two foundations in association with Andrew Mellon donated over \$500,000 toward buying parkland; the state matched these funds, and the National Seashore project was back on track (Stick 1958, 250-253).

Hard feelings followed what some called the “land grab” by the U.S. government. Many questioned the management policies of the Park Service, including Buxton resident Bill Dillon, who complained in a 1973 interview that the National Park Service (NPS) was “bent on letting the ocean come over and do whatever it feels like doing...we are truly locked in a battle for survival with the Park Service” (Dillon 1973, 8). Islanders were especially peeved when problems with erosion led the Park Service to propose beach driving restrictions in 1978. Rather, many villagers felt that the erosion could be better stopped with jetties, the building of a new inlet, or artificial reefs made from scrapped merchant vessels (Glonek and Quidley 1978).

Another volatile issue concerned a 1974 National Park Service proposal to ban commercial fishing on weekends along the elbow of the Cape during the months of January, February, and March. Spearheaded by sport fishing interests in New Jersey, the proposal was lambasted by islanders as running contrary to the Park's agreement to guarantee fishermen a right to earn a living in the seashore area (Gray 1974).

The development of a paved road linking the villages of Hatteras Island preceded the establishment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore in 1953. The road was built in sections starting with Hatteras to Avon in 1948, Avon to Rodanthe in 1950, and Rodanthe to the Oregon Inlet Ferry in 1952. This road was a significant catalyst for change. For example, its development led to the 1955 consolidation of small village schools into the Cape Hatteras School in Buxton. When the Oregon Inlet Bridge was completed in 1963, Hatteras Island was fully connected to the wider world, and this ushered in an era of tourism and development. The pre-highway modes of transportation – walking, sailing, horseback, beach cart – that had so long shaped islander's sense of space and time, and gave rise to phrases such as “bank of the beach,” and “the old 101” (101 sand tracks that always moved and changed), gave way to a single asphalt route that changed everything. Gone were the freight boats, mail boats, fish boats and, in a sense, the art of boat building:

There's still a considerable number of boat builders who could build boats, even shad boats, if there were a demand, but the days of small boats, particularly sailing craft, are past. Mass-produced, factory-built boats are now cheaper. Trucks and hard-surfaced roads have facilitated transport and ruined boat-building (Dunbar 1956, 125).

Roads and bridges also ushered in a new degree of land prospecting, investing, and tourism. Although greatly convenient to Bankers who could drive to Manteo in less than an hour instead of a day, the road also quickened the pace of daily life, bringing about a “tremendous cultural revolution” and the “passing of old folkways...”(Dunbar 1956, 129).

Ironically, in a seaside area, the property most highly prized is that which was of least value prior to the advent of tourists – the beach itself. This sandy waste, the portion of the Banks most vulnerable to storm damage, has the two features, sand and sea water, which constitute the prime attraction of the area to tourists....The acquisition by the National Park Service of all the Banks from Whalebone Junction south to Ocracoke Inlet prevents the repetition there of the pattern established in the Nags-Head-Kitty Hawk area (Dunbar 1956, 129-30).

## **6.0. The Outer Banks Today (2004)**

Vehicles sporting white oval OBX (Outer Banks) bumper stickers are visible throughout the eastern seaboard, underscoring the popularity of Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands as a tourist destination. The predominance of opulent vacation homes and fancy shops and restaurants make it possible for visitors to remain unaware that long-term, traditional communities exist on the Banks. Indeed, much of the interaction between natives and tourists occurs in the context of the services natives provide for tourists as carpenters, house cleaners, waiters, realtors, and other such tourist-based positions. This chapter describes modern-day Outer Banks, and includes a discussion of the major issues Banker communities face in today's fast-paced, tourist-oriented economy. This chapter concludes with a set of management observations and recommendations pertaining to the relationship between Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA) personnel and neighboring villagers.

### **6.1. Regional Overview**

#### **6.1.1. Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands: Ecology and Geology**

Hatteras Island is a narrow 33 mile-long sand bank south of Nags Head's Bodie Island; its width ranges from three miles to less than one mile. Hatteras Island represents the largest stretch of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The northern portion of Hatteras Island includes the eight-mile long Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, a major stopover for migratory birds along the Atlantic flyway. Pea Island has, in the past, been separate from Hatteras with the opening of New Inlet; the last closing was in 1945 (Payne 1985). Wimble Shoals off the northern villages of Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo are the remnants of Cape Kenrick, which jutted into the Atlantic until becoming submerged mid-17<sup>th</sup> century (ibid). The much larger and more treacherous Diamond Shoals off Cape Hatteras are comprised of three shoals: the Hatteras, the

inner, and the outer shoals. The warm Gulf Stream meets the cold Labrador current off of Cape Hatteras creating a “weather-making” chemistry that, along with the shoals themselves, has contributed to hundreds of shipwrecks throughout history.

Ocracoke Island, just south of Hatteras and north of Portsmouth Island, stretches over 18 miles in length and ranges from 100 yards to two miles in width. Ocracoke and Hatteras Islands were connected in the past, but have been separate banks since the Hatteras Inlet opened in 1846. The Hatteras Inlet was created by the same hurricane that opened the Oregon Inlet (Payne 1985).

Although Ocracoke Island has no major shoals off its Atlantic shores, it has had its share of shipwrecks due to the close proximity of Diamond Shoals about 20 miles to the northeast. Ocracoke Inlet, on the southwest end of the island, was the most important gateway to North Carolina during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; it is the only inlet along the northern banks that has been continuously open since 1585 (Payne 1985).

The barrier island ecology of Hatteras and Ocracoke is rich, diverse and extremely dynamic. Although the width of the islands is as small as a half mile across in some areas, there are distinct environmental features associated with the estuary, maritime forest and the ocean beach zones. The interior boundaries of Hatteras and Ocracoke islands face Pamlico Sound and are characterized by saltmarsh, tidal creeks, and lagoons. The shallow waters contain expansive beds of SAVs (submerged aquatic vegetation), intertidal sand and mud flats and shell bottom; they function as a refuge and nursery for benthic larvae, juvenile fish and hard clams. Crabs, minnows and shellfish make use of the intertidal and subtidal estuarine waters for spawning. The estuarine shoreline also provides habitat for a large variety of waterfowl, as well rodents, terrapin, and otter.

Maritime forests found along Ocracoke and Hatteras Island are characterized by a variety

of trees and shrubs (e.g., live oak, red cedar, pines, wax myrtle and yaupon bushes) that appear sculpted or stunted by their close proximity to saltwater spray and high winds. The trees provide a windbreak and form a buffer between the estuary shoreline and the ocean shoreline, although in the past forest drifting sand dunes have swallowed forested area. The forests provide an important habitat and refuge for numerous species of year 'round and migratory birds, as well as mammals such as deer, raccoon, rabbit, and fox. Springer's Point, an area of marsh and trees on Ocracoke, represents one of the northernmost edges of southern maritime forest. Buxton Woods is the largest maritime forest ecosystem along the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, and contains both northern and southern vegetation as well as fresh water marsh.

The barrier island beaches function as shock absorbers for the powerful Atlantic Ocean, and are characterized by miles of straight, uninterrupted shoreline, dry sand area between the high tide mark and the dunes, and a slightly higher, ever-shifting dune zone. Nearshore Atlantic ocean waters provide habitat and feeding grounds for important migratory finfish and marine mammal species, including menhaden, striped bass, Atlantic croaker, dolphins and whales. The sub-tidal zone is replete with a variety of worms, coquinas, and sand fleas that provide food for shorebirds. The dry beach area functions as an important nesting ground for four species of sea turtle, most commonly for loggerheads. The beach supports ghost crabs, beach fleas, a variety of amphipods and insects and numerous species of birds. Sand dunes deflect salt spray and provide some resistance to wind and wave erosion as well as ocean overwash. Dunes harbor a rich variety of wildlife, including birds, reptiles, possums, shrews and mice. Dune plant life is adapted to salt spray, wind and shifting sand, and includes sea oats, panic grass, cord grass, golden rod, cactus and pennywort. Natural dunes along Hatteras and Ocracoke are characterized as low and discontinuous with overwash passes; the high, continuous dunes today are the result

of sand fencing, bull dozing, and dune/grass planting (North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources 2005).

### **6.1.2. Villages**

Since the paved highway and bridge was built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, connecting the banks to the world via automobile and truck traffic, village life has changed considerably compared to earlier decades. Tourism and real estate sales began escalating in the 1970s and have shown no sign of abating. When Hatteras villages went “on-line” with the county water department, using new reverse osmosis plants in Buxton and Rodanthe in 1997, high density building was possible; this factor is viewed as an important “tipping point” for many islanders expressing concern over the level of development in their communities.

The seven villages of Hatteras Island are still unincorporated, and are part of Dare County. Census figures indicate that Dare County had a permanent population of 29,967 in 2000, about 4,000 of whom lived on Hatteras Island (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002). The seasonal population for the county is estimated to swell to 200,000 in 2000 (ibid,14).

Ocracoke Island has one village, which is unincorporated and part of Hyde County. In 2000 about 770 permanent residents lived on Ocracoke, with the estimated seasonal population peaking at ten times that number. Hyde County projects that the seasonal population will grow to 8,500 by 2007 (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-57). All villages have been bordered by federally owned land since the 1953 establishment of Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

The villages today bear little resemblance to the pre-highway and bridge communities described in the ethnohistorical sections of this document. All the villages of Hatteras and Ocracoke are growing in both seasonal and permanent population, and are experiencing an unprecedented rate of construction and development, despite recent hurricanes. Ocracoke’s



growth in new shops and rental homes, however, is limited by a sheer lack of acreage suitable for development; Ocracoke is also the only village without an ocean shoreline. The flow of tourists slowed somewhat in the several months following Hurricane Isabel in 2002, but has been rapidly increasing. The volume of people visiting Cape Hatteras National Seashore has more than doubled in the past decade, growing from 2.1 million in 1990 to 2.9 million in 2000 (Nolan 2001).

The percentage of islanders dependent on commercial fishing is declining, and the current boom in real estate values have contributed to a reduction in working waterfront areas and fish houses. Several factors have changed the character of commercial fishing in the last decade, including strict federal, regional, and state fishing restrictions, a new state licensing structure limiting the number of commercial fishermen, and shrinking profits due to low market prices from a growing flood of imported seafood. Other factors affecting the fishing industry include social conflicts with recreational interest groups, a growing privatization of waterfront areas, and soaring property taxes.

### **6.1.3. Demographic History of Hatteras and Ocracoke Villages**

Census data is available for the townships of Kinnakeet (including Avon, Salvo, Waves, and Rodanthe), Hatteras (Hatteras village, Frisco, and Buxton), and Ocracoke (Table 6.1.1). The steady increase in population for the Hatteras Township through 1940, even during the depression years when the other townships experienced declines, is largely due to increased commerce upon the opening of the inlet in 1846. Ocracoke experienced a small but steady decline in population from 1920 to 1970, but ultimately escaped the fate of the now extinct village of Portsmouth due to the highway and the Oregon Inlet Bridge that bolstered the small village's tourism industry. Kinnakeet Township shows a fluctuating population from 1900 to

1950, and a low of 434 people in 1960. This was likely due to a periodic need for northern island residents to leave in seek of work; this region lacks easy access to an inlet, and therefore has not had as large a commercial or charter boat industry as Hatteras village. All areas show a marked increase in permanent residents from 1970 to 1980, although Ocracoke’s gains have been relatively modest due to limited residential development space.

Table 6.1.1. Population of Kinnakeet, Hatteras, and Ocracoke Townships: 1870-2000.

Year	Kinnakeet Township	Hatteras Township	Ocracoke Township
1870	599	673	368
1880	631	821	400
1890	793	906	466
1900	842	987	548
1910	644	1,041	565
1920	712	1,115	587
1930	663	1,132	547
1940	806	1,201	525
1950	576	1,046	509
1960	434	1,217	475
1970	565	1,333	541
1980	1,060	2,783	658
1990	1,158	2,675	690
2000	1,359	2,642	769

Source: United States Census Bureau 2000.

## 6.2. Chicamacomico (Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo)

### 6.2.1. Population

Census figures for the specific villages are not available, but the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce reported that, in 2002, 567 people lived in the tri-village area of Salvo, Waves and Rodanthe, also historically known as “Chicamacomico.” Villagers recall approximately 15 houses per community existing before World War II; each was separated by some two miles of

empty beach, in stark contrast today's continuous strip of buildings. According to the Dare County Land Use Plan, Salvo had 482 living units (most of which were detached homes), compared to Rodanthe's 335 units and Waves' 241 units (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002). It is unclear how many of the total 1,058 homes were for permanent versus seasonal residents, but the building trend favors rental structures. Since 2002, all three villages have experienced a tremendous building boom, particularly after Hurricane Isabel in 2003. This increase in housing will likely translate into more seasonal residents rather than permanent, as most new houses are eight-bedroom "rental machines;" other buildings consist of new shops and strip malls geared to upscale visitors and tourists.

### **6.2.2. Land Use**

Salvo is the southernmost village in the "netherlands" of north Hatteras Island, bordered by a long stretch of Park seashore to the south and the village of Waves to the north. According to the Dare County Land Use plan, "Salvo will continue to develop in the established patterns with a mix of permanent homes and businesses along NC 12 and seasonal residents along the immediate ocean and estuarine shorelines" (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002,12). Most commercial development in Salvo is geared toward "providing services to the seasonal population" (ibid). Salvo villagers joined with Rodanthe and Waves residents in March of 2002 to discuss the possibility of further zoning and deriving a consensus plan, as each village is unincorporated and unzoned, and classified as "S-1" which covers setbacks, heights, and density but allows all uses of the land (Nolan 2002, 10). The development potential of each village in 1997 was increased when coming on-line with the reverse-osmosis water plant built in Rodanthe.

Waves is sandwiched between Salvo to the south and Rodanthe to the north. The close proximity of the villages makes it difficult to discern community borders, but locals explain that Salvo runs from Wimbles Shores Road on the north end to south of Clark's Bethel United Methodist Church. Waves is characterized by "predominantly detached residential structures" and several trailer parks and campgrounds (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 12); and, given soaring property values, trailer parks and campgrounds have a questionable future in this area.

No Outer Banks community has fought harder against zoning restrictions than Rodanthe, the last village before entering the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. The Dare County Land Use Plan calls Rodanthe one of the "the last frontiers in unincorporated Dare County in terms of the residents continued resistance to land use controls" (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 12). There is, however, concern directed toward "unpopular or incompatible uses and/or structures" in the village (ibid). The lack of subdivision regulations for houses built decades ago has left the village with "a multitude of private roads in poor condition" (ibid). This, along with the periodic disrepair and flooding of NC 12, makes transportation a primary issue for villagers. According to the Dare County Land Use Plan, Rodanthe is similar to other unincorporated areas of the county in lacking "any defined pattern of development" and is made up of residential lots and structures of "various sizes and ages" (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 12).

A 1.0 MGD reverse osmosis potable water plant was built in Rodanthe in 1997, serving the village and sister villages Waves and Salvo. This has all but eliminated the need for private wells and the problem of saltwater intrusion, ocean over wash, and septic seepage that threatened to contaminate well-drawn drinking water (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 12). The well water is safe but of poor quality for drinking, and residents who formerly bought bottled water rather than ingest the well water are satisfied with the quality of RO water for drinking.

Solid waste is transported daily to Bertie County from the Chicamacomico Volunteer Fire Department, a waste station serving all three communities. All villages along Hatteras and Ocracoke make use of individual septic tank systems; the newer “rental machine” houses are built with individual “package” sewage treatment systems, allowing for a greater density of development.

### **6.2.3. Government**

All three villages are now served by a U.S. post office in Rodanthe, although in the past each had its own facility. Salvo has its own volunteer fire department, while Rodanthe and Waves share the Chicamacomico Volunteer Fire Department; all three villages have access to EMT rescue squad services based at the Chicamacomico fire station.

### **6.2.4. Employment**

In the past, when Coast Guard stations were operating every seven miles along Hatteras Island, U.S. Coast Guard jobs were of central importance to the northern banks, and the Midgett name was synonymous with life saving. Today, in 2004, many Salvo, Waves and Rodanthe residents seek employment at nearby Nags Head and Manteo. Additionally, they find employment locally in tourism, real estate or construction, and a handful of residents still fish commercially in Pamlico Sound or out of Oregon or Hatteras Inlet. Without a doubt, construction and service jobs associated with tourism and development are Chicamacomico’s “growth” industries.

### **6.2.5. Churches**

Two churches are active in Salvo: the Salvo Assembly of God and Clark’s Bethel United Methodist. Clark’s Bethel United Methodist Church is the last remnant of Salvo’s former name

“Clarks.” On the border of Rodanthe and Waves is the Fair Haven United Methodist Church, which has been the primary church for these two villages since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **6.2.6. Civic Organizations**

Villagers in Salvo, Rodanthe and Waves are proud of their history, and some are active in the Chicamacomico Historical Association while others volunteer their time at the Chicamacomico Life Saving Service Station site and museum. Some of the native residents complain, however, that outsider influence has taken over the life saving station museum, while museum volunteers complain that natives are disinclined to participate. Recent changes at the Chicamacomico station, including a newly implemented admission fee and structure modifications that compromise the historic integrity of the facility, have exacerbated these concerns.

Chicamacomico residents make use of the Rodanthe Waves Salvo (RWS) Community Center in Rodanthe. The RWS Community Center is located in the refurbished old Rodanthe School by the harbor, and is used for a variety of events including the “Old Christmas” celebration for which Rodanthe is famous. Old Christmas is not organized by a formal group, but by members of a handful of old Rodanthe families long involved in the tradition. Old Christmas is one of the few remaining rituals celebrating Chicamacomico culture, yet it is not embraced across the board; some native and non-native families of the northern banks are wary of the event’s reputation for drinking and brawling, although this aspect has been toned down in the last decade.

### **6.3. Avon**

#### **6.3.1. Population**

The permanent population of Avon stood at 792 in 2002, according to the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce. Of the 1,400 living units listed in the 2000 Dare County land use plan, 49 were condominiums, illustrating the extent to which Avon is experiencing development more than most of the Outer Banks communities (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002). Other indicators of growth include a new shopping center, pharmacy, movie theater, traffic light and a Food Lion grocery store.

#### **6.3.2. Land Use**

Within Avon's boundaries are two distinct sections. There is the old village of Kinnakeet, comprised of year-round residents who have strong genealogical ties to the village, and a residential development and business district centered along NC 12 designed to serve the seasonal population. There is some overlap, as Hatteras Island's only chain grocery store on NC 12 serves both seasonal and permanent residents, as well as the new medical center. The old village of Kinnakeet is one of the region's last holdouts for a working waterfront and commercial fishing activity. The community is comprised of single-family homes, trailers, and a fish house (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002). Hatteras Island's very first beach lot development, called "Hatteras Colony," was begun in Avon in the 1960s, and a small canal-side development within the village, called Port Avon, was built in the 1970s.

On-site septic tanks and drainfield systems serve most residents of Avon, but the development known as Kinnakeet Shores Soundside Subdivision uses a central package

treatment plant. This plant not only serves residential homes of the subdivision, but also the associated commercial complex called Hatteras Island Plaza (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002).

Although development in Avon and other island villages has what the Dare County Land Use Plan calls the “natural growth inhibitor” of poorly drained soils and no central sewage treatment system, business is booming. New construction is evident in all villages, but according to the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, Avon is one of the fastest developing Hatteras Island communities. The year 2001-2002 saw a particularly heavy amount of building despite a national recession. This was likely due to low interest rates and a tremendous influx of wealthy northerners who see a bargain in Hatteras Island real estate prices. Hurricane Isabel did little to discourage development after devastating the island in 2003 and, in fact, another building boom began as older, damaged homes and hotels were replaced by larger tourist-oriented facilities.

### **6.3.3. Government**

Avon has its own post office. In the early 1990s there was a push to return the name of the post office to Kinnakeet. The vote was very close, but the name Avon won out by a handful of votes. For the most part, villagers opposed the change because they wanted to keep the name “Kinnakeet” to themselves and said that the greater community was not Kinnakeet. The Avon Volunteer Fire Department serves the greater Avon area.

### **6.3.4. Employment**

Similar to other Outer Banks villagers, Avon residents find employment in the three main sectors: government, tourism, or commercial fishing. Unlike the other villages, there seems to be a disproportionate number of folks from Avon who work for the ferry division. The reason



for this is historical and political, as Avon is a largely Republican village with strong ties to key political figures. Particular families have held ferry jobs throughout the years, and have an advantage in obtaining such employment (Glazier et. al 1993). There are also many jobs in the construction business, and the many real estate offices in Avon offer jobs in sales and rentals.

Real estate is a huge business in Avon, as the section outside of old Kinnakeet has been the island's "hot spot" for investors and new rental housing. Retail shops, surf shops, hotels, and restaurants also benefit from a healthy tourist industry. Just south of Avon is "Canadian Hole," a popular sound-side site for wind surfing and kite boarding. The name is derived from the large portion of Canadians that travel to the site.

Avon has a strong history of boat building and commercial fishing, and although the level of dependency on the fishing industry is declining, it is still important to the village. There is one remaining seafood dealer in Avon, with a branch facility in Hatteras village; he and one other fish house owner are the last commercial fishery dealers on the island. The Avon seafood dealer is also a commercial fisherman, and served on the state marine fisheries commission before resigning in 2004.

#### **6.3.5. Churches**

The village of old Kinnakeet has a United Methodist and Assembly of God church, both of which have played a central role in community life and in the history of the village. A relatively new Baptist church is located in a shopping center on Highway 12.

#### **6.3.6. Civic Organizations**

The Avon Property Owners Association is the only Avon-specific organization. It has 1,500 members (all property owners are automatically members) and 500 who pay dues and

therefore have a voting membership. But the majority of members are non-natives, and many of those are non-resident property owners. The group meets at Easter and Thanksgiving when many out-of-towners are present, and undertakes activities such as petitioning the state for maintenance of sub-division roads when the pre-requisite number of houses has been built. They have also placed garbage cans near walkways to the beach and keep up the wooden walkways to discourage tourists from trampling the dunes. They also offer a scholarship to Cape Hatteras school seniors, with a preference for Avon students.

#### **6.4. Cape Hatteras (Buxton and Frisco)**

##### **6.4.1. Population**

According to the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, Buxton had around 1,163 full-time residents in 2002 (Personal Communication 2003), making it the largest community on the Outer Banks. The centrality of the village, both geographically and in terms of community services such as education, explains the village's size. Buxton is growing in population like all other Outer Banks communities, and is experiencing an influx of Hispanic residents. Although Buxton is made up of mainly permanent residents, it is a magnet for seasonal visitors, as it is home to the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. The recent relocation of the Lighthouse brought Buxton international attention, as well as an especially heavy tourist flow. The village has its share of vacation rentals on the beach and sound side. There are lots of retirees in Buxton, and shady subdivisions tucked into Buxton Woods. U.S. Coast Guard housing in Buxton has provided a steady influx of new residents to Buxton, but the de-commissioning of the residential section of the base in 2005 has halted that trend.

Frisco, a satellite village just south of Buxton, had 845 permanent residents in 2002 (Personal Communication, Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce 2003), making it a mid-sized community compared to surrounding villages. Frisco is clearly growing along with other banker villages, particularly in development of rental homes that cater to seasonal visitors. A growing number of retirees make their home in older sub-divisions of Frisco, such as Brigand's Bay and Indiantown Shores. On the other hand, elderly residents are inclined to move off-island to be closer to medical facilities.

#### **6.4.2. Education**

All children who attend public school on Hatteras Island go to Buxton's Cape Hatteras School. All the separate village schools closed and became consolidated into Cape Hatteras School after the highway linked the communities in the 1950s, to the objections of many islanders. Cape Hatteras was a K-12 facility until 1997, when it split into Cape Hatteras Elementary School (K-5) and Cape Hatteras Secondary School (6-12). This year a new primary school facility was completed in the Buxton Woods area of the village, representing the first time in decades that secondary school students and elementary school students meet at different sites. The schools had total enrollment of about 360 students in 2002 according to the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce. A new elementary school is in the process of being built in Buxton Woods. The school building is a meeting place for a variety of non-school events, including concerts, religious meetings, and English as a Second Language classes. There is also home schooling on the island. Many home schooling parents are also very active in their churches.

For college or technical training islanders must travel off-island unless participating in "distance learning" Internet courses. The closest institutions of higher learning are The College of the Albemarle, Elizabeth City State University, and East Carolina University, although some

students opt to attend school out-of-state in the nearby Hampton Roads, Virginia. The College of the Albemarle is a community college with a satellite campus in Manteo.

### **6.4.3. Land Use**

Buxton is the midpoint of Hatteras Island and serves as the “commercial and institutional hub” for all the island communities (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 13). The population is mostly permanent, and although the community is developing with single-family homes and modest residential developments, growth is controlled by special zoning regulations aimed at protecting the large maritime forest known as Buxton Woods (ibid). The effectiveness of this zoning is sometimes in question, however, as evidenced by the recent removal of a tremendous oak tree and disruption of surrounding historical graves by a new property owner in a county-controlled area.

Frisco is at the south end of the thick cape area that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean, and sits on the margin of Buxton Woods. The ecology of the area is noticeably denser with trees and vegetation than southern portions of the island, although Hurricane Emily in 1993 wiped out many pine and live oak trees that once lined the highway through Frisco.

As with Buxton, maritime forest influences development in Frisco. Areas within Buxton Woods are zoned as SED-1, while property outside the maritime forest area is subject to S-1 minimal zoning regulations. The S-1 district lacks use-specific guidelines, and has resulted in commercial development along NC 12. An effort to adopt more restrictive zoning in 1998 was unsuccessful “due to the lack of community consensus of desired land use patterns along the vacant road frontage of NC 12” (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 13). Some Frisco residents

pushed hard for zoning in response to a proposed go-cart park, but meetings were contentious and residents never reached an agreement; the go-cart park was built and operates today (ibid).

The Billy Mitchell Airstrip, located next to Frisco on National Park Service land, is the only airstrip on Hatteras Island. The Park Service maintains the 3,000-foot airstrip. NC 12 is the only highway, and Frisco – like all other villages, save Hatteras and Ocracoke - has no direct ocean-inlet access.

#### **6.4.4. Utilities**

The Cape Hatteras Electric Membership Cooperative, based in Buxton, provides energy for residents and facilities on Hatteras Island. Throughout the 1980s islanders experienced outages and brownouts during the summer months because the plant could not keep up with demand. Electrical appliances would blow out, and customers lost microwaves, televisions, and refrigerators all in one shot. The company recently undertook a vast upgrade of the system to solve that problem.

The Dare County Water Department serves Buxton, as well as Hatteras Village, Avon, and Frisco. Water use fluctuates greatly, depending on the season. Water use in July is roughly twice the amount used in February (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002). A combination of Reverse Osmosis and Anion Exchange water systems service the southern half of the island, drawing water from 19 shallow wells situated in the Buxton Woods superficial aquifer. The RO plant draws from four brackish wells in the Mid-Yorktown aquifer (ibid).

#### **6.4.5. Government**

Although Manteo is the official county seat of Dare, Buxton is Hatteras Island's informal county seat, as the village houses satellite county offices and personnel such as social services, the health department, building inspection, and (much to the disgust of Hatteras Village who formerly housed this) the sheriff's office. Buxton furthermore houses federal government offices such as the Cape Hatteras National Seashore District Ranger and maintenance offices for the National Park Service. The Coast Guard Group Cape Hatteras offices are housed in Buxton, including administration, electronics, engineering, housing, medical, and supply. Buxton also is the site of the Coast Guard's Search and Rescue base. The U.S. Department of Interior has an office in Buxton. Until eight years ago the National Weather Service also had a facility in Buxton. The Hatteras Island Rescue Squad has a station in Buxton, as does the Buxton Volunteer Fire Department. Frisco has its own fire district and station.

#### **6.4.6. Employment**

Because of the location of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and associated offices, museum, gift shop, and grounds, there are numerous National Park Service jobs filled in Buxton. The Coast Guard Group Cape Hatteras offers another major source of employment, although recent downsizing and the de-commissioning of the residential base has shrunk this source. Cape Hatteras School is a major employer on the island. Some villagers fish commercially or work as charter boat captains. There are numerous restaurants, motels and shops in the village offering seasonal employment. A small public harbor is in Buxton, as is the island's only boatyard for repairs, painting, and so on.

Villagers in Frisco work in the commercial fishing, tourism, or government sectors,

similar to other Outer Bankers. Frisco is also home to the only boat building facility on Hatteras Island, “Frisco Boat Works,” which makes 32 to 65-foot cold-molded sport fishing boats. Frisco has the only golf course on Hatteras Island (nine holes), and harbors a Native American museum that hosts a regional inter-tribal Pow Wow. Frisco also has a couple of North Carolina craft stores, a wooden furniture store, Frisco Rod & Gun, the Frisco Supermarket, and a post office.

#### **6.4.7. Churches**

Buxton has more churches than any other Hatteras Island community. The “United Methodist” and “Assembly of God” churches are the oldest places of worship in the village. “Our Lady of the Seas” is the only Catholic church on the island, and caters largely to newcomers and Latino laborers. “Cape Hatteras Baptist Church” and the non-denominational “Church of Living Water,” “Hatteras Island Christian Church” and “Church of Christ” also offer services in Buxton. The two churches in Frisco are the “Assembly of God” and the “Little Grove United Methodist Church.”

#### **6.4.8. Civic Organizations**

The Fessenden Center, a multi-use recreational facility, was constructed by Dare County in the mid-1990s. It serves as a gym for sporting events and a meeting place for other community gatherings. It offers activities for seniors, and exercise classes for women. Its small meeting rooms are used by a variety of non-profit groups. The Hatteras Business Association is based in Buxton and promotes tourism and business ventures. The Cape Hatteras Angler’s Club, organized since at least the 1960s, has a meeting house in Buxton. The organizers were small business owners who thought fishing tournaments would help increase tourism.

“Friends of Hatteras” was very active in Buxton, although it has petered-out somewhat in recent years. The purpose of this organization was originally to preserve Buxton Woods from haphazard residential development. Their main issue concerned the wells in Buxton Woods. Buxton’s water used to come from the Cape Hatteras Water Association (serving Hatteras through Avon) until Dare County took over when the reverse osmosis plant was built. Friends of Hatteras had been against the expansion of wells in the woods. Publicly they maintained that they were not against development, but many residents thought they were. Their stance against wells back-fired in a sense, because the reverse osmosis plant increased the available water supply and allowed for more development (Buxton had been under a moratorium on new hook-ups to the Water Association for many years because of there was not enough water).

The North Carolina Fisheries Association Hatteras-Ocracoke Auxiliary operates out of Buxton, and is a satellite organization to the largest commercial fishing trade group in the state. Largely organized and led by wives of commercial fishermen, the auxiliary seeks to preserve and promote the fishing industry in the area by holding fundraisers, writing letters to legislators, and testifying at fisheries hearings.

## **6.5. Hatteras Village**

### **6.5.1. Population**

According to the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, the permanent population of Hatteras Village was 634 people in 2002. The National Park Service estimated that the seasonal population of Hatteras Township expanded from a permanent population of 1,660 in 1990 to 4,010 during the summer of that year (Glazier et. al 1993), and today that figure is much higher. Hatteras Island is developing in the southernmost section near the ferry terminal, where large



rental homes are springing up to serve the burgeoning seasonal population. These homes sleep up to 20 people and are called “mini-hotels” or “rental machines,” and have swimming pools, hot tubs, and five to eight bedrooms. The big cottages visible around the ferry docks rent from \$2,500 to \$6,000 a week in the prime summer season. Construction began on two major developments in the heart of the village shortly after Hurricane Isabel in 2003, and ground was broken in 2005 for a development on and around the former porpoise factory grounds.

### **6.5.2. Land Use**

Hatteras village is the southernmost community of Hatteras Island and is the only village on Hatteras Island with an inlet close by. This inlet has shaped the modern village, starting with the birth of the charter boat industry in the 1940s. The village is a maritime hub between Pamlico Sound and the Atlantic Ocean, and is an important anchorage for sailboats and yachts. Commercial fishermen from points north find it convenient to keep their vessel at fish houses and marinas in Hatteras Village for ocean access.

Hatteras village is surrounded by federally-owned National Seashore grounds, much of which was former hunt-club property donated for the Park. The ferry terminal property is owned by the state, and adjoining U.S. Coast Guard property is federally owned.

Commercial development is greatly in evidence, as the ferry landing is surrounded by new and under-construction multi-story, multi-family beach homes, as well as a tremendous sport fishing marina complex housing a yacht club, slips for private boats and charter boats, and restaurants and shops. This commercial nexus is the result of the “Hatteras Landing” planned development approved by the county in the 1990s (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 13).

Hatteras Landing also has the Holiday Inn Express, the only chain motel besides the Comfort Inn in Buxton. The Landing was built to attract tourists, especially ferry travelers.

Heading north of the ferry terminal and away from the new construction and marinas, NC 12 winds through Hatteras village proper, made up of picturesque old homes and town square type facilities like the post office, library, stores, and a daycare center. Meandering roads, small cuts and creeks, and small bridges give Hatteras Village a contained quality similar to Ocracoke.

Hatteras village, as well as the six other communities on the island, is classified by Dare County as a “limited transition” area, which is a category that provides for development in areas that “have some services but are suitable for lower densities...and are geographically remote from existing towns and municipalities” (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 13). According to the Dare County Land Plan, Hatteras village has “done well in retaining its coastal village character while accommodating growth directed to the seasonal population,” despite the lack of zoning restrictions (ibid). On the other hand, a survey undertaken for the National Registry of Historical Places concluded that no historic district could be established because of too many post-1950s buildings and raised-up houses (Van Doslen 1999).

### **6.5.3. Government**

Hatteras village is the southernmost point of Dare County. The community has a post office and volunteer fire department. Physicians are available for routine and emergency care at the regional medical center in Hatteras. The medical center in Hatteras is affiliated with the new medical center in Avon. Both are Health East Family Care facilities, connected with Pitt Hospital and three doctors rotate shifts at the centers. The center formerly transported trauma patients from Billy Mitchell airport in Frisco, but now has a helicopter pad to transport them to regional hospitals.

#### **6.5.4. Employment**

Because of the close proximity of Hatteras Inlet, Hatteras village is a hub of marine-related activities with jobs available to residents. These include the Hatteras-Ocracoke ferry, the Hatteras Coast Guard station, two fish houses, charter boat facilities, marine supply stores, fuel docks, and high dollar marinas. The charter boat industry began in Hatteras village and continues to thrive. The village had more damage from Hurricane Isabel (2003) than any other Banks community; hotels, restaurants, and marinas were demolished, and the new inlet cut the village off from the rest of the world from mid September to the first of December. By spring of 2005 businesses still had not fully recovered from the effects of the hurricane, as charters and hotel reservations were down. Construction continues to boom, however, as repairs carry on and new developments such as Slash Creek proceed.

#### **6.5.5. Churches**

In Hatteras village there are two churches: The United Methodist Church, with a mix of native and seasonal membership, and the smaller and more local Assembly of God church in the old “Sticky Bottom” section of the village.

#### **6.5.6. Civic Organizations**

The Hatteras Village Civic Association (HVCA) is by far the most active civic organization on the island, serving as an organization for members to meet to discuss important issues and relay those issues to the county (Glazier et. al 1993). The Association was instrumental in pushing for a maritime museum in Hatteras, an effort that was frustrated and

abandoned in favor of the “Graveyard of the Atlantic” museum. The HVCA owns the post office building, and the Graveyard of the Atlantic houses its temporary offices on the second floor. They own the Hatteras Civic Center, a former auto parts store. They also own the Hatteras Community Center, housing the only public library on the island and offering space to Employment Security personnel who come there in the winter so people can file for unemployment benefits.

## **6.6. Ocracoke Island**

### **6.6.1. Ocracoke Village Population**

The village of Ocracoke was home to 769 permanent residents in 2,000, over half of whom are non-native to the island (Nolan 2003). The seasonal population swells to 3,000 – 7,000 residents (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-7). No other CAHA community has a higher level of tourist influx relative to the small, confined nature of the village. Historically Ocracoke was a favored destination of recreational hunters and fishermen, and tourist accommodations have been present on the island at least since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. But, 20<sup>th</sup> century developments in infrastructure, including the 1950s establishment of the state ferry system and the construction of Highway 12 north to Hatteras Island and Nags Head, paved the way for an accelerated influx of visitors. Touted as a “quaint fishing village surrounding the Silver Lake Harbor,” by the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, Ocracoke’s charm is compromised by the top-heavy nature of its tourist economy.

Despite its popularity as a vacation destination, Ocracoke has not experienced a major population boom. For the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population gradually dropped, from 587 people in 1920 to 475 in 1960. From 1970 to 1990 the population increased by 32 percent, primarily due to influxes of the 1970s. It has remained relatively stable in recent years, hovering

between 750 and 790 permanent residents. The stability is largely due to a lack of new building sites, as some 90 percent of Ocracoke Island is uninhabited federal property. Building code restrictions, such as the prohibition of high-rise condominiums on the island, discourage dense living spaces. Another factor is the island's isolation and lack of amenities that discourage a booming retiree population, including hospital facilities, shopping malls or local government. Nonetheless, the population is expected to gradually rise, according to the Hyde County Land Use Plan (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-5). The plan also projects that the island will be built to capacity (all available building parcels developed) by around 2010 (ibid, III-10).

In terms of demographics, Ocracoke's population is growing younger and more ethnically diverse. This is due to two trends: the influx of Latino residents, a group now representing over 2 percent of the population of Dare County, and the out-migration of older residents. Ocracoke Child Care reports that an impressive 17 percent of children enrolled are Latino, reflecting the fact that incoming Hispanic families are young and working. Some are seasonal, hired according to the H2B work visa program, and others stay year-round, picking up jobs in restaurants, construction, fish houses, hotels, and grounds maintenance (Nunn 2002).

Ocracoke has experienced a decline in its 55-64 population, which is in part due to rising property taxes, according to the Hyde County Land Use Plan. "Increasing property values are resulting in rapidly increasing tax values. This is having a...negative impact on the ability of long-time Ocracoke residents to pay the taxes and retain property" (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-64). Hyde County has increased property taxes several times since the 1970s. In 2002 Hyde's tax rate for Ocracoke was 0.95 per \$100, compared to Dare County's rate of 0.54, and an average of 0.76 for Hatteras Island communities. Hyde County lowered the tax rate to 0.70 per \$100 in 2003, but at the same time re-evaluated property values on the island. Alton Ballance's

modest island house, for example, was valued at \$179,511 in 2002, and he paid \$1,705 in property tax. One year later his house was valued at \$511,345, and his tax bill was for \$3,579 (Nolan 2003).

### **6.6.2. Land Use**

Out of a total of 5,575 acres making up Ocracoke Island, only 775 acres comprise Ocracoke village on the southernmost end of the island; the federal government owns the remainder and is part of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. There are no zoning laws on Ocracoke Island, resulting in mixed land uses such as interspersed residential and commercial facilities, oddly positioned lots, houses and trailers, and chicken pens juxtaposed to gift shops. Although villagers expressed concerns about haphazard and accelerating development, a zoning referendum was defeated in 1981. The “Ocracoke Village Development Ordinance,” however, was adopted by Hyde County in 1986 to:

[P]romote the public health, safety and general welfare by regulating the density of population; the size of yards and other open spaces; the height, size and location of buildings and other structures; to provide for an adequate transportation system; and to provide for adequate drainage, water supply, and sewage disposal (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-10).

The ordinance restricts buildings to 35 feet or smaller in height, and establishes setbacks and a minimum lot size. These provisions, according to the county land use plan, are not sufficient in controlling Ocracoke’s development. Between 1990 and 1997, 125 new houses were built on Ocracoke. Several new non-residential facilities have been constructed since 2000, including a hotel, a multi-store facility, and a replacement post office.

The 1986 Land Use plan named “inconsistent land use patterns” as the island’s most significant land compatibility problem. This was changed to “infringement of development on

natural and fragile areas” by 1997, as development has proceeded without proper permits, wetlands have been destroyed, storm water runoff and septic seepage has made Silver Lake unfit for swimming, and marina and boat discharge has contributed to degrading water quality (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-10).

The Ocracoke Sanitary District provides water service, using two deep wells (each over 600 feet deep) that draw from the Castle Hayne aquifer and a desalination plant. The primary well produces 600 gallons per minute, while the secondary well produces 400. The Sanitary District had less than 500 customers when service began in 1977. By 1997, they had close to one thousand metered customers. During peak season, water use more than triples. Ocracoke has one 150,000-gallon elevated storage tank and a ground storage capacity of 232,000 gallons (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-13-15). Drinking water on the island is considered marginal in taste, and many islanders buy bottled water (Personal Communication 2004).

There are no publicly owned sewage facilities on the island, with the exception of the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s ferry landing facilities. Although a handful of commercial facilities have advanced septic systems with low flow pumping, most sewage is treated by conventional septic tanks. Like the water service, sewage treatment is overtaxed during the height of tourist season, and there is concern that septic tank seepage is contributing to declining water quality. Although islanders have discussed the possibility of a central sewage treatment system, the increase in population density that could result from such a system outweighs environmental concerns associated with septic tanks (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-15-16).

The 2,500 tons of trash generated annually on Ocracoke is a growing issue, as many islanders feel the waste-removal system has been substandard and is overburdened during tourist

season. During warm months it is common for the “downtown” Silver Lake area to reek of garbage. As there is no solid waste landfill in Hyde County, Dare County is contracted to collect trash from Ocracoke and transport it across the Hatteras Island ferry to a landfill some 70 miles away. Recently the National Park Service enacted a controversial policy of removing garbage cans from the beaches, in an effort to force visitors to remove their trash.

Tideland Electric Membership Corporation supplies electrical service to Hyde County, including Ocracoke, and power is purchased from North Cape Hatteras Electric Membership Cooperative. Electrical shortages, brownouts and blackouts were a problem on Ocracoke until 1990 when a larger supply cable was installed and a co-generating plant built. Power outages still occur occasionally, however, as salt spray shorts insulators on transmission wires (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997).

Many residents and businesses own generators in the event of hurricanes or other causes of power loss. A larger supply cable under Hatteras Inlet and other improvements to the service were completed in the late 1980s, which reduced brownouts and blackout problems on the island. A cogeneration plant was built on the island in November 1990 and is licensed to operate at 200 hours per year. It normally functions two to three hours per day during peak demand periods, although when the Bonner Bridge collapsed shortly after the plant was completed, severing power lines to the island, the plant operated as the sole power source until the lines could be repaired (Glazier et. al 1993).

Ocracoke is located within the 100-year flood plain area, and is routinely subjected to storm water flooding. The Hyde County Land Use Plan names “hurricane destruction” as the single greatest hazard to development in the village (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-33).



Villagers have expressed great concern over the development occurring on the island and, until the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust recently bought it, feared that a historically significant and ecologically delicate area known as “Springer’s Point” would be sold and built upon. Local historians believe that Springer Point was the location of Pilot Town, the Island’s first English settlement.

### **6.6.3. Government**

In 1845 Ocracoke’s county assignment was moved from Carteret to Hyde, located across from Pamlico Sound on the mainland. Today, in 2004, Hyde is largely agricultural and isolated, and if not for Ocracoke, Hyde would be one of North Carolina’s most economically depressed counties. Ocracoke village has no mayor, sheriff, or other such formal county office, but has one seat on the Hyde County commission and school board. Unlike the prosperous Dare County, Hyde County is decidedly rural (the county has no municipalities), sparsely populated (it has the lowest population density in North Carolina), and low-income. Relations with Hyde County are lukewarm at best, as island villagers complain about the small amount of county services they receive relative to the high amount of taxes they pay to the economically depressed county. As a recent example, villagers point to Hyde County’s poor execution of emergency management procedures during hurricane Alex of 2004 when, due to miscommunications, the island’s tourists were not evacuated until after the storm and flood. Some villagers resent being “held hostage” as Hyde County’s “cash cow,” and would prefer to be under the jurisdiction of Dare. An ongoing debate questions whether Ocracoke should incorporate, giving the village more control of land-use issues. But, “no clear consensus on the issue exists” (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-19). After the 2003 property revaluation of Ocracoke, the 750 residents carried almost

54 percent of Hyde County's tax burden, while only making up 13.2 percent of the county's population (Nolan 2003).

Other governmental entities that most directly impact the lives of Ocracokers include regulatory bodies for fisheries: the state Division of Marine Fisheries, the regional South Atlantic and Mid Atlantic Councils, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Ocracoke fishermen feel that they have inadequate input in regulatory decisions, both due to their geographic isolation and the nature of how the fisheries management system works. With the exception of a few residents who faithfully attend meetings and participate on advisory boards, most fishermen are of the opinion that it is a waste of time to travel to meetings only to be disregarded by policy makers.

The National Park Service is a daily presence in the lives of Ocracokers, as National Park Service employees manage the Ocracoke lighthouse, pony pen, campgrounds, and seashore, some 90 percent of the island's land mass. The island's water supply comes from wells on Park property, and the National Park Service sold land to the county for the airstrip and jail. The National Park Service allowed the Ocracoke Preservation Society to operate a museum on government property. The National Park Service also has provided services such as pump out facilities at the public docks, and fire department and law enforcement assistance (Glazier et. al 1993).

The Hyde County Sheriff's Department sends three deputies to Ocracoke, on a rotating basis, who patrol the island and maintain an office and two four-man cells. Police activity heightens during the peak season, particularly with regard to traffic violations and drunk and disorderly behavior (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, Glazier et. al 1993).

The county keeps four full-time emergency medical technicians (EMTs) on the island, and one “modern fully-equipped” ambulance (Hyde County Land Use Plan, III-18). Patients are typically transported to the Ocracoke Health Center for initial treatment, then if necessary to the hospital in Elizabeth City (Glazier et. al 1993). Two private medical helicopter services, based in Greenville, North Carolina and Norfolk, Virginia, serve the island. A physician’s assistant and a registered nurse staff the health center. To see a doctor, dentist, undertaker, social worker, or mental health specialist, however, residents must seek services off-island. The nearest hospitals are in Elizabeth City (a four-hour drive) and Morehead City (a three and one half hour drive); one prime factor discouraging retirees from spending their twilight years on Ocracoke.

The Ocracoke Volunteer Fire Department is comprised of approximately 25 active and well-trained members. “Through a mutual aid agreement, the department keeps a trailer-mounted pump with a 250 gallon per minute pumping capacity which is owned by the National Park Service” (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-18). Their equipment is adequate for one- and two-story structures, but is not capable of managing fires in anything higher. Most calls are for brush fires in the National Seashore area in the summer (Glazier et. al 1993).

#### **6.6.4. Employment**

Ocracoke, like other Outer Banks communities, continues its historical reliance on tourism, government jobs, and commercial fishing. In 1980, about a third of the residents were employed by the Coast Guard, the Ferry Service, the National Park Service, or the school. In recent decades, tourism has overshadowed all other sectors of employment and is responsible for the highest level of economic return for the island. Secondary employment is vital to residents, especially during off-season winter months. According to the Hyde County Land Use Plan, most

full-time non-retired residents have two or more sources of income. These jobs include commercial fishing, net mending, construction, and crafts associated with cottage businesses (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, III-50).

Only a handful of people are full-time commercial fishermen (mainly crabbing and gillnetting); most fishers supplement their income with other jobs. One fish house owner provides a local market for fishermen, but it is not uncommon for watermen to sell fish directly to local restaurants. Unlike fishermen in the deepwater port towns of Wanchese or Beaufort, Ocracoke fishermen do not have the option of working on large, ocean-going vessels, but work small boats (20- to 40-feet long) in near shore waters of Diamond Shoals or in Pamlico Sound (Glazier et. al 1993).

Ocracoke, like Hatteras Island, benefits from a lucrative marine sport fishery. Native islanders familiar with the waters hire out their services to visiting anglers eager to take advantage of North Carolina's world-renowned saltwater fishing. Ocracoke and Hatteras Village have several privately owned and operated charter boats (six passenger capacity) and larger "head" boats (30-100 passenger capacity). There are also a slew of tackle and bait shops associated with recreational fishing. Unlike Rodanthe, Avon and Frisco, Ocracoke has no large fishing pier available to the public. Recreationally sought species include striped bass, red drum, kingfish, flounder, gray trout and mackerel. There is no saltwater fishing license requirement in North Carolina, but the Division of Marine Fisheries collects data via phone and dock surveys, as well as National Marine Fisheries Service programs.

### **6.6.5. Churches**

The four churches on Ocracoke are the United Methodist Church, the Ocracoke Assembly of God, the Christian Science Church Group (which meets at various times) and the Annunciation Catholic Church (which meets at the Methodist facility on Fridays).

### **6.6.6. Civic Organizations**

The Ocracoke Civic and Business Association (OCBA) is an organization for local cottage businesses. As of 1997, more than 70 of the 100 Ocracoke businesses were members of the OCBA. The Ocracoke Preservation Society is the island's historical association, and is responsible for designating and maintaining historic sites, and has interviewed and videotaped dozens of Ocracoke residents about their history.

### **6.6.7. Education**

The only educational facility on the island is the K- 12<sup>th</sup> grade Ocracoke School, the smallest in North Carolina. The present six classroom, wood-frame building was built in 1971, with additions constructed in 1978. In 1993, 99 students were enrolled in the 135 student-capacity school. In 1997 enrollment was down to 75 students, and today (2004) it stands at about 100; much of the growth can be attributed to the influx of Latino families. Basketball is the school's only sport. Ocracoke School has been recognized as a School of Distinction, a North Carolina School of Excellence, and a "Top 25 School" (Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce 2001). The school enjoys considerable community support, and is at the center of much activity on the island as a variety of fund-raisers, musical events, and variety shows take place in the gym.

## **6.7. Modern Issues**

Contemporary life on a barrier island retains some of the same challenges of earlier decades, such as vulnerability to storms, potential isolation in the event of road and bridge washouts and, at times, limited occupational choices. Yet, today's residents face new problems as well, most of which are associated with the sheer numbers of people living on or visiting a shifting, fragile, sandbank. These contemporary problems, discussed below, include: beach erosion and dune stabilization; transportation, impact of development on environment and quality of life; impact of development and real estate values on community integrity; shortage of labor and affordable housing; erosion of traditional livelihoods and life-ways; and relations between residents and Cape Hatteras National Seashore staff;

### **6.7.1. Beach Erosion and Dune Stabilization**

Historically villagers built their homes on the sound side of the island and, in the event of a rising tide, would simply allow the water to wash through the house. If a structure floated off its foundation, villagers moved it back, or to higher ground. Since the 1970s and, most intensely in the years leading up to and following Hurricane Isabel in 2003, opulent rental homes with swimming pools and hot tubs have been built on what has become the most valuable real estate on the Banks: the beach. The ocean shoreline outside National Seashore boundaries is packed with multi-level, high-dollar homes vulnerable to storm winds, ocean waters, and beach erosion. The natural, westerly migration of North Carolina's barrier islands threatens these structures, and "(w)hen this process occurs along a developed shoreline it eventually collides with private

property or public infrastructure and comes to be described as ‘beach erosion’” (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 26).

Environmental organizations express concern about potentially negative impacts of sand pumping on the intertidal and beach ecosystem, and coastal geologists point out the futility of such projects against the intense energy and movement of North Carolina’s oceans and barrier islands. Village residents are largely opposed to using tax dollars to fund sand-pumping, contending that the public should not foot the bill for beach homeowners in their efforts to protect private property. This issue is ongoing for the entire coastline and no simple solution is in sight.

#### **6.7.2. Transportation**

The issue of maintaining NC 12, the only route through the Outer Banks other than by boat or small plane, is a continuous problem for Ocracoke and Hatteras Islands. Before the dunes were built up and paved roads established, erosion and over-wash was a frequent fact of life, and residents expected yesterday’s sand path to disappear under tomorrow’s tide. The hardened roads of today present a difficult problem in the event of storm damage, as road repair is an expensive and time-consuming necessity. Seven areas have been identified as likely washout areas in the Dare County Land Use Plan, including a section just north of Buxton that went out in 1999’s Hurricane Dennis and a section north of Hatteras village that became an inlet after Isabel in 2003. A section of highway near the National Seashore campground on Ocracoke washed out in Isabel as well.

Access to Hatteras Island and Ocracoke is of critical importance because of the businesses that depend on delivery trucks and a flow of visitors. It is also a public safety issue in terms of hurricane evacuation. The only route off Hatteras Island becomes clogged, and

evacuees run into the Nags Head traffic heading north to Virginia. The increased number of cottages and visitors on the island has compounded this problem. Locals are known to “ride out” the storms, but many have changed their minds after witnessing the devastation of Isabel.

Bonner (Oregon Inlet) Bridge has outlived its lifespan and is due to be replaced. A barge hit the bridge in 1990, knocking out a span and bringing island traffic to a standstill for six months. A ferry was set up to cross Oregon Inlet until the Bridge was repaired. The state built emergency ferry docks in Rodanthe for future emergencies.

State planners proposed a new, longer bridge and causeway that would bypass Pea Island and come in at Rodanthe in lieu of repairing the Bonner Bridge. Another option was a new bridge and causeway that would run along the sound, bypassing all villages except for exit ramps. This would address the problem of NC 12 washouts as well. The project has been delayed numerous times due to environmental impact studies and a lack of funds. Most recently the state decided to build a new bridge that would not bypass Pea Island, but this has yet to be funded.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation operates the ferry system, and Ocracoke islanders are completely dependent on this service for vehicular traffic and the flow of goods and services. The Hyde County Land Use Plan names transportation as one of the island’s critical issues, particularly in regard to seasonal traffic congestion along Silver Lake road where the Cedar Island and Swan Quarter ferries load and unload. Paradoxically, the county also supports “the establishment of a high speed ferry between Ocracoke and the mainland” which would increase the flow of visitors to the island (Hyde County Land Use Plan 1997, xxvi). Hyde County planners recommend relocating the Swan Quarter ferry to East Bluff Bay, which would shorten the two and one half hour trip from Ocracoke to the County Seat by 45 minutes; this



change has yet to be implemented. Planners are also considering making a one-way road to and from the ferry to alleviate congestion.

### **6.7.3. Impact of Development on Environment and Quality of Life**

The Dare County Land Use Plan lists the following top three areas of concern for the future of its coastal communities based on a series of public meetings and a mass-mailed survey. The first pertains to water quality, sewage disposal, and storm water management. The second relates to water supply and sewage treatment. The third deals with economic diversification (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002). All these concerns are linked to the impact of development and tourism in barrier island communities. The expansion of impervious surface associated with new parking lots, roads, driveways, and roofs are directly related to storm water flooding and runoff that contains chemicals, septic tank overflow, and other pollutants detrimental to shellfish, sea grass, and other fisheries habitat life. Villagers worry that a decline in fisheries will compel everyone to depend on notoriously seasonal and low-paying tourist-related jobs. Many lament the clearing of trees, disruption of cemeteries, and altering of the native landscape in favor of gated-type communities replete with non-native plants such as palm trees. For islanders, such activities symbolize the uprooting of their culture in favor of an imported lifestyle. Although some villages, such as Ocracoke and Hatteras, have started to address the problem by adopting a variety of building restrictions, there is little sign that construction is slowing. Community leaders throughout the banks are debating the merits of more stringent zoning, town incorporation, and – in the case of Ocracoke – secession to a new county. A long-entrenched opposition to zoning from villagers and political opposition to new governmental configurations are roadblocks that challenge such action.

#### **6.7.4. Impact of Development and Real Estate Values on Community Integrity**

Although, in many cases, islanders have profited from the burgeoning tourist and recreation industry—and could stand to make huge profits by selling land—this prosperity exacts a cultural cost. The quaint, neighborly character of these villages has been compromised by an increasing number of new houses, shops, and developments in the heart of town. Recently, a group of Hatteras villagers from the Civic Association appeared before the Dare County commission to object to a proposed 45-unit condominium with 46 boat slips on the environmentally-sensitive Slash Creek. They presented ideas for specific building restrictions previously aired before fellow villagers at a series of public meetings. They asked for help in keeping “the ever diminishing quality of life in our small community” (Nolan 2002, 10-11). The commissioners accepted their proposals, but were immediately served with a lawsuit, brought forth by several Hatteras business owners. The issue split the community until Hurricane Isabel hit, putting development on the back burner and compelling villagers to work together. After Isabel, state officials declared the Slash Creek area altered by the storm and eligible for required building permits. In 2005, commercial development of Slash Creek, along with dozens of other areas in the Outer Banks, is underway, changing the appearance and character of small villages.

Ernie Foster, son of the founder of the Albatross charter boat fleet, wrote an article entitled, “Thoughts on Watching a Village Die.” Foster described such developments as:

[Nondescript ‘rental machines’ ...[by] outside investors ...[who] intend to make a quick profit...chang[ing] forever the physical nature of the village and its social fabric. Once these structures are built, they will be there beyond our lifetime...These are structures that will never be homes (Foster 2002, 13).

Communities full of fishermen, carpenters, and other blue collar workers long accustomed to depending on one another are at odds with the private, sanitized lifestyle imported with such affluence:

Hatteras is on its way to becoming a place that no longer has a place for its commercial fishermen. Already, homes are being built on what was once a place to mend nets, sell fish, and store crab pots. Now there are complaints from the new owners about the smell of fishing. When you have a place where, if you actually work and make your living there you cannot afford to live there, then you have a strange place indeed (Foster 2002, 13).

The Dare County Commissioners have responded to many of the above concerns.

Commissioners are considering countywide zoning, controls on building density and better wastewater treatment for Hatteras Island. They recently outlawed commercial structures over 20,000 square feet in unincorporated areas, and set a moratorium on new commercial signs (Nolan 2002). In response to villagers' concern over the proliferation of "mini-hotels" or six-eight bedroom rental houses, commissioners voted to tie the number of bedrooms allowed in a house to the size of the lot and the septic capacity. Individual villages have discussed the possibility of zoning as well, but run headlong into a strong reluctance by property owners who do not want to relinquish control of their land.

Despite the concerns shown by county commissioners, there are few little signs that development is abating. Proponents of controlled growth are not yet effectively organized, and continue to grapple with a problem that has overwhelmed the island since the 1990s when builders, developers and outside money came pouring in. Islanders express concern about many of the changes that come about as a result of development, including the appearance of chain stores and restaurants, cable television, the push to sell liquor by the drink, other signs of mass media culture, and an increasing drug abuse problem.

High real estate values also have an impact on village life as residents, some of whom are struggling commercial fishermen or other such traditional users of the water, are compelled to "cash in" and sell waterfront property and family land. Those who choose not to sell and

continue to live on the island are faced with increased property taxes which have more or less tripled since 2002. A group of concerned Ocracokers proposed a tax relief bill in June of 2003 that would allow eligible townships (where revaluation was 150 percent higher “than the average increase in all the other townships combined”) to be taxed at 50 percent of appraised value, deferring the remainder until the property owner sells (Nolan 2003, 17). This bill was not supported by Hyde County commissioners and ultimately failed.

#### **6.7.5. Shortage of Labor and Affordable Housing**

As a growing number of affluent visitors and residents buy property on Hatteras, there is an increased need for laborers to serve those people (e.g., lawn care, house cleaning, restaurant work, seafood packing, retail sales, etc.). At the same time, there is increasingly less affordable housing available for blue-collar workers. Many of the low-rent trailer parks are being sold to developers, as the booming real estate values prove tempting to landlords. Outer Banks communities have addressed their labor shortage by hiring foreign workers from a variety of European countries and Latin America. Many businesses provide apartments or trailers for their laborers, but local families worry that they and/or their children will no longer be able to afford to live and work on Hatteras or Ocracoke Islands.

#### **6.7.6. Erosion of Traditional Livelihoods and Life-ways**

Commercial fishing has long been an integral part of the history of North Carolina coastal communities, and the Outer Banks is no exception. Associated with commercial fishing are a number of occupations that also share a place in the state’s maritime economy including: boat building, net making, crab pot manufacturing, charter boat fishing, seafood processing,

marketing, and shipping. While fishermen have struggled with growing restrictions on their livelihood since the 1980s, many had an especially difficult time when market prices became severely depressed for key fisheries in the early 2000s. Consequently, some commercial fishery participants have abandoned their occupation altogether. High fuel prices and lack of political support have exacerbated the problem. Up until the 1980s there were about a dozen fish houses on the Outer Banks. As of 2005, only one company operates out of Ocracoke, and two out of Hatteras. Fishermen worry that shrinking profits will compel the remaining fish house owners to sell their property, eliminating the necessary infrastructure to carry on a viable seafood industry: working harbors, fish houses, and seafood trucking.

Fishing is far more than an occupation for island participants; it is a source of cultural identity that has, in most cases, been in the family for generations. Thus, the decline of the fishing industry and associated work means far more to villagers than a change in jobs. The growing popularity of “heritage tourism” and an effort to establish local, niche markets offers some hope to fishermen, but they still must be able to afford to live on the islands and have a place to keep their vessels.

#### **6.7.7. Relations between Residents and Cape Hatteras National Seashore Staff**

Since the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Park was established in 1953, relations between the National Park Service staff and Banks’ residents have ranged from indifferent to problematic, if not hostile. The reasons for this are many and complex, stemming from the initial acquisition of property for park land, a process that some islanders refer to as the “land grab.” Compared to the exorbitant property values today, the price families were paid for waterfront land in the 1940s and 1950s strikes modern villagers as a pittance, although some

concede that open beach land once was regarded as having little value. Most complaints that have followed the establishment of the Park pertain to people's belief that they have lost certain freedoms in their own Banks' environment under the rules and regulations imposed by the National Park Service. Related to this is the widespread complaint that the National Park Service has done a substandard job of maintaining public relations and communicating with local residents.

However, the current rate of development has indirectly cast a better light on the Park in villager's minds, as many appreciate that "their" land has been preserved and protected from outside investors and developers. Acknowledging the ambivalence with which many people regard the National Park Service and the outright hostility some have toward Park policies, a villager declared, "The Park Service saved us from ourselves." He continued:

The Park Service is not great – their public relations is awful. It's like they show up with a club with a nail driven through it to try to soothe people's feelings. But hell, independent of that, where would we be? We could be Nags Head. I am fascinated by the foresight of various groups that had all these hunting clubs and large tracts of land. The Phipps family owned all of Cape Point, the Gooseville Gun Club owned from the ferry dock down to the inlet, Pea Island wildlife refuge was owned by some hunting club. These people gave their land to the government.

## **6.8. Management Observations and Recommendations**

A survey undertaken for the 2002 Dare County Land Use Plan update asked if federal agencies such as the National Park Service facilitated the needs of county residents. 67.5 percent of the respondents, many of whom were non-resident homeowners, answered affirmatively. 22.6 percent, most of whom were full-time residents, disagreed that federal agencies served their needs. The negative reaction "may be explained by the fact that full-time residents have day-to-day interaction, and sometimes conflicts, with federal agencies due to the dominant federal presence in Dare County" (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002, 7).

The relationship between the National Park Service and neighboring villages is often referred to as a “shotgun marriage,” whereby Bankers have had little choice but to live within the confines of a bureaucratic agency. “The Park Service has an agenda of the way things are supposed to be,” said a resident. “That’s not a marriage, and it can never be a marriage.” Many residents refer to wording in the Act establishing Cape Hatteras National Seashore that assures villagers that the Park will not interfere with their ability to make a living fishing: “That the legal residents of villages referred to in section 1 of this Act shall have the right to earn a livelihood by fishing within the boundaries to be designated by the Secretary of the Interior, subject to such rules and regulations as the said Secretary may deem necessary in order to protect the area for recreational use as provided for in this Act” (National Park Service 1941, 2). Fishing restrictions imposed by the National Marine Fisheries Service or the state Division of Marine Fisheries are sometimes conflated in villagers’ mind as stemming from the National Park Service, while most realize that many other agencies impose regulations on their activities, but believe that those agencies should heed the original agreement of the government.

Islanders also refer to a “promise” contained in a letter to islanders from National Park Service director Conrad L. Wirth published in the *Coastland Times*, October 27, 1952. Wirth wrote that the “National Park Service and its staff stand ready to cooperate with you at all times in the development of your communities, if you want us to. I hope we can work together as partners, and that we can look forward to a long and pleasant association...” (Kozak 2002, 1). Wirth added that the National Park Service “proposes to resume the sand-fixation work; to re-establish the natural plant and wildlife within the area, and to provide access to the beach for everybody” (ibid, 3-4). Bankers now regard these as broken promises: they do not believe they have been treated as partners but as recipients of policies; they do not believe the National Park

Service has successfully protected island dunes and beaches, especially after the government adopted a “let nature take its course” approach in 1973 and abandoned dune restoration efforts (ibid); and finally, restrictions imposed on commercial fishing, recreational fishing, beach driving, and hunting is overly restricting beach access.

Tom Hartman, a well-respected Park superintendent who filled the position from 1981 to 1994, noted a deeply entrenched conflict between the “competing goals of resource protection and visitor use,” and what villagers want and what “Congress dictates the Park Service can do” (Kozak 2002, 6). Hartman pointed out that the intent expressed in Wirth’s letter ran against later legislation, such as “the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the Endangered Species Act of 1972” (ibid). Coupled with the fact that the Banks are a “dynamic resource” that changes quickly according to natural forces and human manipulation, “Park managers found themselves master of an unruly subject” (Kozak 2002, 6).

Several observations were made by villagers in interviews for this project or in articles in local newspapers concerning how relations may be improved between the National Park Service and residents. Most centered on the issue of communication, as relayed by an Ocracoke resident in the following quote:

Why doesn’t the Park Service engage in problem solving dialogues with the communities located within the boundaries of the Park? Typically the National Park Service unveils a new program or policy – such as rounding up feral cats in the village or taking away trash cans – without discussion with the communities that are affected. Officials announce that a public meeting will be held to listen to the citizens. These meetings are always set up in a manner which stifles problem-solving and promotes confrontation. What if two or three members of the National Park Service staff took the time to have a sit-down-at-the-table discussion with community leaders to find mutually satisfying solutions to problems? (Scarborough 2001, 10-11).



The “manner which stifles problem-solving,” according to residents, is that meetings seem organized as a means to inform locals about a new policy and why the policy is needed, rather than a means to collaborate with villagers to solve a problem. Some villagers feel strongly that a policy is a “done deal” by the time it is presented to communities, and resent what they perceive to be a “one-way” channel of communication. They would prefer to have information, as well as input, early in the process, before decisions are made; this would improve communication, dialogue, and ultimately, staff-Banker relations:

[Take the restoration of the] Weather Bureau. Somebody from the Park Service could find out when the Hatteras Civic Association meeting is, and make a little presentation, an update. Offer to do it rather than be asked. Proactive rather than reactive. The Park Service is always in defensive bureaucratic mode. They operate independently of the community. If you are the professional operating this massive system that is impinging on everyone who lives there, what does it cost to throw out olive branches? Most people will be swayed by the better argument.

Residents generally believe that the National Park Service is not attuned to the culture of the Banks, and feel the organization needs “someone whose job it is to be culturally sensitive. That would be a contribution, and when they have to fight these awful battles over beach access and all this mess, they would have a little currency in the bank.” The Park Service’s efforts to uphold and enforce legislation such as the Endangered Species Act has given villagers the impression that plants and animals are valued above people, and many wonder why cultural resources are not given the same due as natural resources. For example, a man from Buxton participated in a National Park Service-sponsored effort to manage a user-conflict between fishermen and sailboarders. After serving on a committee organized by the service, he expressed frustration regarding the National Park Service’s role in educating the public about local communities and traditional uses of the environment:

Sailboarders were cutting our nets. They didn’t mean to do it, but they’d approach our net and instead of jumping it, they’d veer off and tilt their board so the fins

would hit the top of the net and cut it. The Park Service formed this little committee and I was on it. I told them since they explained the history of the area to the tourists they should also educate them about our nets. They said, we can't make public speeches like that. I said, why can't you? You tell them about shore birds, the lighthouse, turtles. If you can't educate them about us, why, there's no use of me being on this committee.

The fisherman conceded that the idea of making allowances for native residents is a slippery slope, as more outsiders are moving to the island permanently, bringing new perspectives, values, and pressures to bear. "They can't have a special rule for me and a different rule for somebody else just because they're from New Jersey."

Based on these observations, we offer the following recommendations:

- Adopt a collaborative model of problem-solving with community members for issues that pertain to them. When possible, avoid presenting pre-conceived solutions/policies to community members, and avoid using meetings as a means by which to simply provide information to the exclusion of receiving input and promoting real dialogue.
- Continue to contract professional mediation services that can direct negotiated rule-making for particularly contentious issues and federal directives. This method is currently being used for the development of an off-road vehicle (ORV) management plan; despite the high degree of disagreement and long history of conflict over the ORV issue, the mediation team interviewed stakeholders, assessed the likelihood of a successful outcome, and determined that negotiating rulemaking should proceed. The development of the plan will, therefore, proceed with citizen participation and a consensus-building approach, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and lasting solutions in which various stakeholders are invested.

- Train designated National Park Service staff in the methods and benefits of public mediation, as staff confidence in the use of mediation is important in its promotion and success; this will also improve staff member's skills in interacting with the public.
- Designate a staff member as cultural envoy or ambassador, who establishes regular, lasting relations with village representatives and civic groups and can communicate concerns of community members to headquarters.
- Promote the living history of Hatteras and Ocracoke Islanders by sponsoring or taking part in events that celebrate the unique culture that long preceded the establishment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. This could include sponsoring "community nights," whereby residents were invited to share stories from the designated community, and perhaps bring a covered-dish of traditional food/favorite recipe. The National Park Service could show slides of many of the historical photographs on file.
- Design interpretive programs that are interactive and involve demonstrations by community members, such as yaupon-tea making, net hanging, storytelling, drum stew-making, or even lifesaving drills.

## **7.0 The Eight Study Communities**

### **7.1. Rodanthe**

#### **7.1.1. Relation to Other Villages and Beyond**

The 1850 census reported that Chicamacomico Banks, including Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo, had a total of 206 people and 37 families (Wechter 1975). The communities perched on this northerly margin of Hatteras Island were distinct settlements, with Rodanthe to the north, Salvo to the south, and Waves between the two – all separated by about two miles with small creeks and little bridges. Yet, they were necessarily co-dependent, and given the area’s relative isolation and limited marriage choices, interrelated.

Rodanthe and Waves, however, were particularly close knit, while Salvo functioned more independently. Salvo was once called “Clarks” or “Clarksville,” while the two villages to its north were once “Chicamacomico” and “South Chicamacomico,” and, later, “Rodanthe” and “South Rodanthe,” underlying their continued close relationship.

The two northernmost settlements have long shared a church, Fair Haven Methodist, while Salvo housed its own Methodist church as well as the only Assembly of God church in Chicamacomico. Rodanthe shared a post office with Waves until 1939, while Salvo has had its own since 1901. Although the Chicamacomico Volunteer Fire Department originally served the tri-village area, disagreements between volunteers from Salvo and those from the northern two villages resulted in the breaking off and establishment of the Salvo Volunteer Fire Department.

Rodanthe has historical ties to the mainland fishing village of Wanchese through the commercial fishing trade and kin relations. Some Wanchese residents attended Rodanthe’s Old Christmas celebration, one of the few “off-island” communities to do so on a regular basis. Until the late 1950s, Brad Payne of Wanchese was the official “drum beater” at Old Christmas,

keeping time with the coveted Payne family pre-Revolutionary War drum along with a horn player and harmonica player from Rodanthe (Norfolk et al. 1951).

Despite their reputation for living in an isolated community, Rodanthe villagers are quite worldly, having done much traveling for work, military service, and school before the Oregon Inlet Bridge was built. Family members' service in the Coast Guard caused people to relocate near and far, from Hatteras, Ocracoke, and Fort Macon to Norfolk, New York, and New Jersey. Many joined the Navy during World War II. An elderly villager recalled leaving Rodanthe during this period to live and work in San Francisco after her husband shipped out to Japan. After the war, her husband joined the Coast Guard and the family moved every two years or so to Philadelphia, Connecticut, New Jersey, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida, until retiring to Rodanthe and opening the Ocean Air motel.

Many villagers have kin in Manteo, Elizabeth City, Norfolk, and Virginia Beach, maintaining an impressive network to and from Rodanthe. Older people sometimes opt to retire to an off-island location such as Elizabeth City to be close to a hospital. Those residing on the island make frequent trips to mainland locations for doctor's appointments, shopping, or visiting. About half the attendees at Rodanthe's Old Christmas celebration live off-island, returning each January for this ritualized homecoming and family reunion.

Today, in 2004, Hatteras islanders and visitors traveling north through Rodanthe can easily miss the village in a blur of tourist attractions and rental homes. But for many decades throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Rodanthe was the northernmost stop of the Manteo-Hatteras Bus Line before crossing the inlet to Manteo; all sand roads coming up from Hatteras village to the mainland literally went through Rodanthe, the home village of the bus line's founders. Therefore, the village was quite familiar to residents of all seven communities to the south.

### 7.1.2. Name, Place, and Features

Rodanthe is the northernmost village on Hatteras Island, and the easternmost point in the state of North Carolina. Although a small community, it has served as the gravitational heavyweight of the tri-village complex known as Chicamacomico. Prior to 1874, Rodanthe was known as “North Chicamacomico” and its sister village to the south was “South Chicamacomico.” The U.S. Postal Service, unwilling to use the lengthy Indian name, chose Rodanthe for reasons unknown. Rodanthe may be derived from the non-native flower *Rodantha* (DeBlieu 1998); some old timers of Ocracoke and Carteret County pronounce the word “Road-Anthony,” but evidence is lacking that the village was named after a person. The village was called “North Rodanthe” as opposed to “South Rodanthe (now Waves) and “Clarks” (Salvo) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but became Rodanthe proper upon the establishment of the Waves post office in 1939. Other pre-postal service names for the village include Big Kinnakeet, Chichinock-Cominock, Chicky, Midgett Town, and Northern Woods (Payne 1985); a villager born in the early 1920s recalled hearing the term “North’ard Woods” for Rodanthe and “South’ard Woods” for Waves. Although the Chicamacomico area is no longer heavily wooded, storms have uncovered large stumps along the beach, thus confirming early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century accounts of deep woods once characterizing the region and making sense of the “North’ard Woods” appellation (DeBlieu 1998).

Three miles offshore of Rodanthe, are the treacherous Wimble Shoals, “remnants of Cape Kenrick,” a major cape of Hatteras Island that existed before the formation of Cape Hatteras, but disappeared in “the middle part of the seventeenth century” (DeBlieu 1998, 49). This shallow, shifting shoal is one of the hotspots that earned North Carolina’s waters the nickname “Graveyard of the Atlantic.” Rodanthe sits on an “unusually thin” layer of sand and peat above

Pleistocene rock, and therefore experiences a higher rate of erosion than Hatteras Island locations to the south (DeBlieu 1998, 19).

New Inlet, 5.6 miles north of Rodanthe, has been closed since 1945. However, it has been open at various times and served to divide Hatteras Island from Pea Island, making Rodanthe the northernmost jumping-off point for Bankers traveling north to Manteo. The state attempted to re-open New Inlet in 1922 to “stimulate the fishing industry on the Outer Banks,” but failed (Payne 1985, 133). The 1933 storm opened the inlet, and the State of North Carolina built a wooden bridge to Pea Island, the remnants of which can be seen today, in 2004. Even after the inlet closed for the last time, joining Pea and Hatteras Islands, Rodanthe was still the northernmost inhabited area for travelers crossing Oregon Inlet to Nags Head and Manteo, although islanders sometimes stopped at the Pea Island or Oregon Inlet Coast Guard Station to rest or eat a meal with the Surfmen (Figure 7.1.1). The Chickinacommock Inlet, just 1.5 miles north of Rodanthe, was opened in the 1650s but closed before 1775 (Payne 1985, 133).



Figure 7.1.1. Old Oregon Inlet Coast Guard Station. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

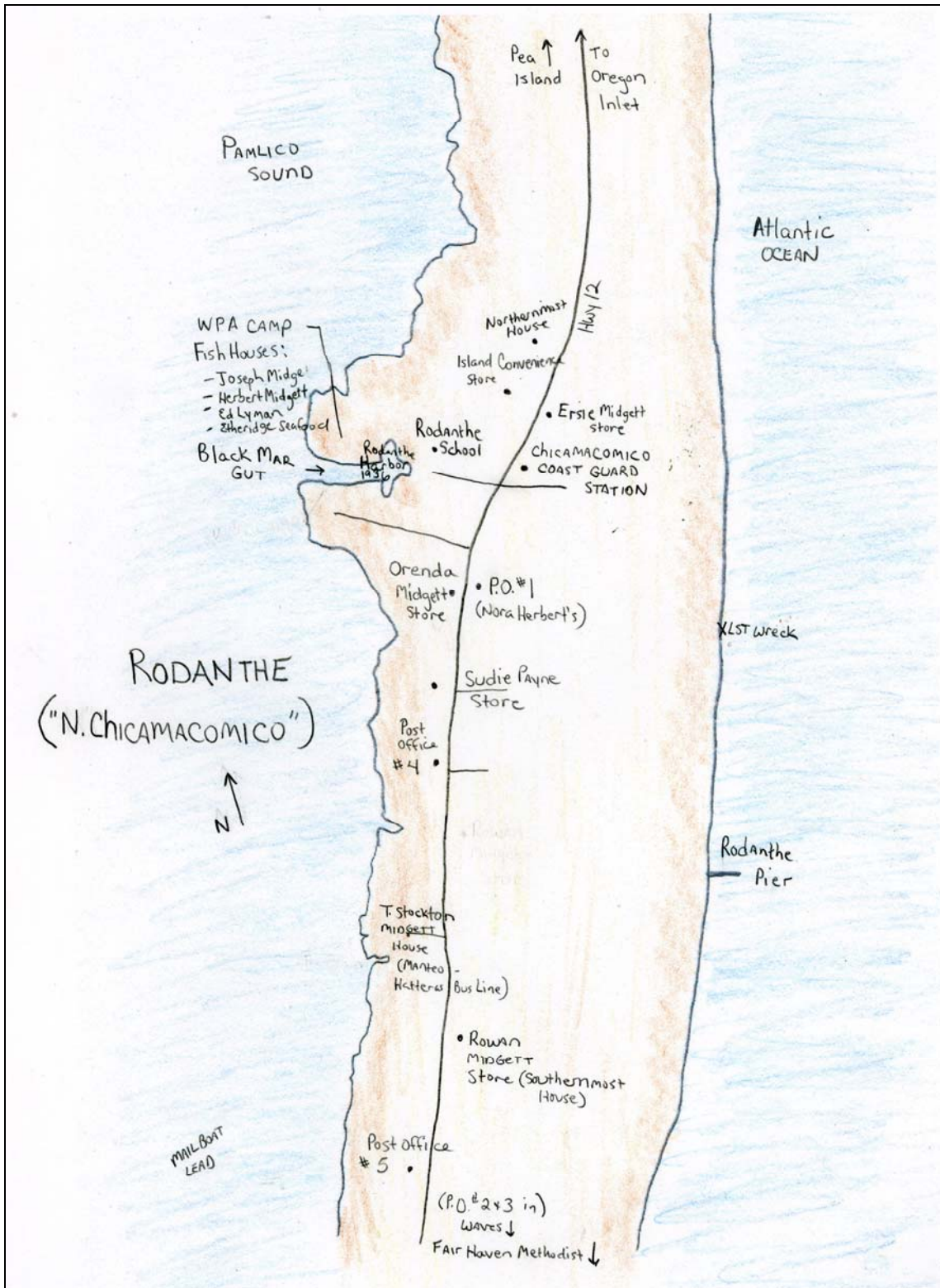
In 1936, the Coast Guard dug a channel and T-shaped harbor on the sound side of Rodanthe in Blackmar Gut, giving the village the distinction of having the only man-made refuge for boats in the Chicamacomico region (Figure 7.1.2). The Harbor was dug to serve the Chicamacomico Coast Guard Station and “only incidentally to serve the local residents” (Dunbar 1956, 115). It is the only Banks harbor not dug by the Army Corps of Engineers (*ibid*). The channel leading up to the harbor was dug seven feet deep, but by 1945 “it had shoaled to 4.5 feet” (*ibid*).





Figure 7.1.2. Satellite Image of Rodanthe.  
Source: NC Division of Marine Fisheries.

The harbor is located at the old Rodanthe school site, where the mail boat used to unload its cargo. The harbor/school area was long the center of the Chicamacomico community, particularly when active fish houses were located there and buyers bid on fish (Map 7.1). The Department of Transportation built an emergency ferry landing at the Rodanthe harbor after the Bonner Bridge was damaged and temporarily closed in 1990.



Map 7.1. Rodanthe Village with Historical Sites (not to scale).  
 Sketch by B. Garrity-Blake.

Today, in 2004, Rodanthe has all but disappeared under the trappings of tourism and development. There is little visible evidence of a village – many of the old houses are hidden in brush or dwarfed by the overwhelming presence of rental mansions and shopping plazas (Figure 7.1.3). Between Rodanthe and the neighboring village of Waves there was once a wetland area called Aunt Phoebe’s Marsh (Payne 1985); this area is now a theme park of sorts with a waterslide, go-cart track, and campsites. The community of Rodanthe, however, becomes manifest each January, when natives travel far and wide to participate in their Old Christmas celebration; an antidote to tourism, change, and cultural homogenization.



Figure 7.1.3. Abandoned House in Rodanthe. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake Photo.

### **7.1.3. School**

Chicamacomico experienced the first consolidation of schools on Hatteras Island, as both the Waves and Salvo schools were closed in the 1930s and children of all three villages began

attending school in Rodanthe. The three-room schoolhouse ran through 11<sup>th</sup> grade until 1947-48 when it became accredited as a 12-year high school. Before the school was accredited, students intending to graduate had to leave the village and board elsewhere to complete their last year. Some attended the school at Hatteras village, staying with local families or at the Atlantic View Hotel, while others left for Manteo and Elizabeth City.

Islanders have fond memories of the old Rodanthe School, including drinking from a rain barrel with a shared conch shell, stoking the woodstove on cold mornings, and studying with a small class of peers who remained lifelong friends. When the Rodanthe School closed around 1953, Chicamacomico, Hatteras village, and Frisco students were bused to the old Cape Hatteras school in Buxton. When the new Cape Hatteras school building was completed in 1955, all Hatteras Island students – including those from the “hold-out” village of Kinnakeet, were bused to Buxton. Consolidation was probably most shocking to the distant communities of Chicamacomico given their strong school pride and long-standing village rivalries.

#### **7.1.4. Church**

Clark’s Bethel Episcopal South (in Salvo) and the Fair Haven United Methodist Church (located on the border between Rodanthe and Waves and established in 1886), have long served the two communities. “That was another way we were separated [from Salvo],” said an octogenarian. “They had their church and we had ours.” Fair Haven was originally located on the sound side, but was rebuilt in the center of the island on the ocean side of the road after damage from flooding. “Everybody went to church,” recalled Anderson Midgett. “Dad or Mother never really made us go to church but they made it so that if you didn’t go to church you didn’t go nowhere else.” Both Methodist congregations in Chicamacomico lost some members

when the Pentacostalist Assembly of God church was established in Salvo in 1927.

Today, in 2004, the preacher at Fair Haven is shared by the Methodist church in Salvo and Avon; she ministers to the three congregations, one after the other, each Sunday. Before the convenience of better roads and transportation, the Methodist preacher would alternate Sundays between the three villages, and during “off” weeks churches held lay-led services.

Church brought villagers together; Hatteras Islanders attended each other’s homecomings and other big events, because of shared kin and an appreciation for social events. This practice is continued today. “When we have homecoming, Pentecostal or Methodist, everyone’s invited, everyone’s glad to see you,” said a villager, adding that “you see a lot of people at the post office too.” A Hatteras villager reflected on the role of camp meetings –or revivals– in bringing distance ends of the island together:

One of the big socializing events would be revivals. Camp revivals in which people from Hatteras would load up equipment for the old traditional camp meeting and go up the banks or down the banks and stay with that family for four or five days. Part of it was the religious services at night but the big draw was the chance to interact. Originally it was Methodist, one of the first religions, but then the Pentecostals came.

Many villagers felt that religion plays a weaker role in today’s community. A smaller percentage of community members attend church regularly, and the church has become less a driving force behind social gatherings and a focal point in people’s lives. “Everyone used to go,” remarked a resident. “That was all they had back then. Now you’ve got civic clubs, genealogies (the Hatteras Island Genealogical and Historical Society); all that kind of stuff to compete.”

#### **7.1.5. Stores**

By the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several small general stores operated in the Rodanthe/Waves area, including those owned by Rowan Midgett, Sudie Payne, and Asa Gray.

Joyce Midgett Rucker described the store that her father established in 1936 to serve the Civilian Conservation Corps who had a base camp in Rodanthe during their dune-building initiative. The store was run by Joyce Rucker's mother Ersie Midgett and staffed by family members. It "more or less opened when needed" during "most of daylight hours or at night." It was the only place in the village, other than the Chicamacomico Coast Guard Station, with a telephone. The Midgetts carried dry goods, canned goods, toiletries, and a weekly delivery of fresh meats, milk, and bread. They kept cold drinks in an icebox, and offered ice cream once receiving electricity. Joyce Rucker helped her mother tend the store, and said that residents bought on credit, tallied in a book, and settled up at month's end. The store ran until 1952.

#### **7.1.6. Pastimes and Childhood Activities**

Visiting was an important after-church activity for villagers. Families hosted neighbors, relatives, and Bankers from other communities to Sunday dinner. "After dinner," recalled an old-timer, "the kids all played on the beach. They had horses that run wild and cattle, so you might be out catching a horse to ride or tailing the cattle. You would grab a hold of the tail and let him sling you up and down the beach."

Children thrilled at the excitement of watching Coast Guard rescues and drills, and they sometimes got to ride in the breeches buoy. "They shot what they called the Lyle [the gun to the grounded ship]. Shot a line over the boat and they would bring people ashore on it. You'd ride what they call the breeches buoy." The friendly relations between Surfmens and village children illustrate the informality of Banker life, and the fact that some of the station personnel and children were likely related.

Teenagers had wiener roasts, fish fries at a fishing camp, chicken stew parties and candy-

pulls at various people's houses. Young people gathered at general stores to play cards, Chinese checkers, or strum guitars. Before World War II, dating was done in groups. Some families left the island for trips once or twice a year, traveling to department stores or amusement parks in cities such as Norfolk.

A Rodanthe woman reported that girls were expected to help with most of the household chores, while boys enjoyed more freedom. Another said that her brothers were treated like kings, and were at the dinner table first to be served by their sisters. The girls helped gather firewood, care for smaller siblings, cook, and wash dishes, while the boys mainly fished with their father.

#### **7.1.7. Medical Care**

There were few doctors accessible to Rodanthe during the first part of the twentieth century, and none based in the Chicamacomico region. A doctor in Hatteras village or Buxton would make house calls to the northern villages, and for major emergencies the Coast Guard or Navy flew people off to mainland hospitals.

Before paved roads and bridges, women relied on midwives for childbirth, such as Orenda Midgett, Mary Williams, Beck Midgett, and Sudie Payne of Rodanthe. After World War II more expectant mothers opted for physician-attended and/or off-island hospital births. An elderly woman born in Rodanthe explained that she was one of nine children, all born at home with a midwife. But, she sought the services of doctors for her own children, born after World War II, and did not choose to deliver them at home.

Families treated everyday medical problems with home remedies passed down for generations. A villager recalled that her mother treated colds with "castor oil and orange, and

that was terrible but it did work!” She and her brothers, like all island children, went barefoot in the summertime, and if they stepped on a rusty nail their mother would “draw” the infection with fat back bacon and turpentine by laying it over the wound. Another person recalled drinking Coca Cola with five drops of ammonia for “nerves.”

### **7.1.8. Early Transportation**

Before automobiles, islanders traveled by foot, horseback, or sailing vessel. Many had small pony carts to transport the whole family. They sailed small skiffs up and down Hatteras Island, and poled in nearby sound waters in “shove” skiffs. Bankers could ride the mail boat or catch a freight boat to Elizabeth City. Cars appeared at Chicamacomico in the 1920s; when a private car ferry opened at Oregon Inlet, villagers drove to the end Pea Island and caught the ferry to Bodie Island and on to Manteo. With the closing of New Inlet between Hatteras and Pea Island, Rodanthe fishermen were at a disadvantage in living a good distance from an inlet, and had to sail to Oregon Inlet to clam and sometimes to fish.

#### **7.1.8.1. The Manteo-Hatteras Bus Line**

T. Stockton Midgett, a Coast Guard surfman who raised his family in a Rodanthe house fashioned from timbers of a wrecked ship, started the island’s first “public transportation” system. Midgett, who had started the general store in 1936 to serve CCC personnel, had a keen eye for business potential. He found himself needing a ride from the Ocracoke Coast Guard Station, and pondered the need for improved transportation. In 1938 Midgett began the Manteo-Hatteras Bus Line that ran from Hatteras Village to Manteo. But he died of a heart attack two months later, leaving 18-year-old Harold, 14-year-old Anderson, and 10-year-old Stockton



“Stocky” Midgett to carry on the business with the Ford station wagon their father had purchased; islanders were glad to have transportation other than sailboat, and used the bus line in such numbers that the brothers soon switched to larger buses. The boys continued the Manteo-Hatteras Bus Line for the next 35 years.

A Hatteras villager looked back at the bus line and marveled:

You had guys that were 15 or so and they were running a bus service, and no one in the community thought that it was odd or strange or somehow wrong or they needed to be regulated – it was, “Thank God someone’s running a bus!” They were a couple of enterprising kids who could do the job.

“We used to bring just about everybody that left Ocracoke to go to Norfolk,” said Anderson Midgett. “They all traveled with us – Ocracoke, Hatteras, Buxton, Avon, Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo, all of them. So we got to know just about everybody in the whole area.”

Until the late 1940s, when paved portions of road were beginning to appear on the island, sand ruts and hard beach formed the only routes, and a small wooden ferry transported vehicles from the north end of the island en route to Manteo. “That was a private ferry run by Toby Tillet and Pam Gallop,” recalled Midgett. “They were both Wanchese fellows with a small ferry named the *New Inlet* and, later, a larger called the *Barcelona*.”

Sand paths changed with blowing sand and swelling tide, thus alternately closing old “roads” and suggesting new ones. Thus, the most expedient route across the island was always in flux and dependent on the variables of tide, wind, and weather conditions. “We used to call our route the 101 – hundred and one roads because there was no designated road. If the tide was out, you drove the surf. If the tide was in, you drove the bank of the beach or a dozen inside roads.” They drove across shallow inlets cut by storms, or avoided deepwater cuts by driving out into the sound. They maneuvered the bus around shipwrecks and across sandy beaches. They

routinely got stuck in the sand, requiring passengers to get out and push. Stocky Midgett recalled when he almost lost a bus:

I was driving to Manteo one day after we had the highway. The ocean tide was coming across the road south of the old Coast Guard station, and the bus motor drowned out. I got out on the front bumper to dry the distributor, trying not to get my feet wet. Meanwhile, the front wheels just fell through the road. I hurried to get the people out and put them on a hill. I had to practically swim [to the Coast Guard Station] but I got there. We took the duck (an amphibious vehicle) back to where the bus used to be. We couldn't find the bus. The bus was completely covered (Tolson 1983, 25).

The Midgett brothers worked endless hours keeping their buses maintained, as sand and saltwater was rough on the vehicles. "It wasn't unusual to break a spring a day," said Anderson Midgett. "Work on them half the night to get them ready for the next day. We started a little garage and kept them painted and washed down. We must have used, in 35 years, over a hundred buses." The Midgetts took out loans when in need of a new bus or major repair, always repaying the bank promptly. "We'd wear them out completely until they rusted right out. Everyone said we were hard drivers but, you had to be to drive on the beach."

Villagers paid around \$2.50 for a one-way trip from Hatteras to Manteo, and in the history of the service "the fare never did go over \$2.75." Their schedule began at Hatteras Inlet, where they met the boat from Ocracoke around 8:15 am. They would then travel north, stopping roughly on schedule at designated stores or post offices, beginning with their own garage/station in Hatteras and continuing to stops that typically included the Frisco Post Office, Eph Midgett's store in Buxton, Gibb Gray's store in Avon, the Salvo Post Office, Asa Gray's store in Waves, and Ersie Midgett's store in Rodanthe. People "knew to sit their suitcase out, and we'd stop and pick them up." The bus reached the ferry at Oregon Inlet four and a half hours later, barring no major delays from storms, flooding, soft sand, or breakdowns. "Sometimes it took us eight hours

and sometimes ten,” said Midgett, adding that it wasn’t unheard of for him and his customers to have spent the night on the beach.

“We’d cross the ferry with Captain Toby, go into Manteo, make connections with the Virginia Dare Transportation company bus...turn right around and come back to Hatteras. That was a daily schedule seven days a week, and we didn’t miss many days.” The round-trip route took two tanks of gas.

The Midgett brothers transported Coast Guard personnel on liberty, students traveling to and from boarding school, and islanders in search of dredge, shipyard, and other jobs. “I can think of many that really didn’t have the fare; when they come back, they’d have the money and pay us for it. They’d ride with us for years and years.”

The bus line was especially busy during World War II, as islanders left to enlist or find work and more Coast Guardsmen and Navy personnel arrived. Despite rationing, the Midgetts were supplied with all the gas coupons they needed. They experienced the close proximity of the war first hand, as Anderson Midgett described:

One morning as I rounded a little turn in the beach, I saw the most tires that you could ever see. They had bombed the ship off our coast that was loaded with military truck tires. You could not hardly drive. One day we found a lifeboat that was bullet-ridden, with two bodies in it. Reported it to the Chicamacomico Coast Guard station when I went by. We had to keep our lights blacked out and when you were driving at night, it slowed you up. You couldn’t drive out on the surf so you had to drive the inside.

The paving of Highway 12 in the late 1950s and the completion of the Oregon Inlet Bridge in 1963 made the Midgett’s route faster and easier, although there was the continued problem of overwash and “cut-outs.” The road also spelled the end of the bus line business, however, as residents and visitors were able to provide their own transportation. But the brothers simply moved on to their next business venture, which would prove lucrative for them into old age, as well as their children and grandchildren: real estate. Midgett Realty now manages “a

substantial portion of land on Hatteras Island” (DeBlieu 1998, 40). “We’ve been in real estate for right good while,” reflected Anderson Midgett. “But I still enjoy driving the beach.”

#### **7.1.9. Postal Service**

Rodanthe acquired a post office in 1874 under postmaster Sparrow Pugh; Pugh requested the name “Chickamacomico” but the Indian name was refused by the United States Postal Service. Edward Pinner, Jr. became postmaster in November 1874, E. Pinner Sr., in 1876, Kenneth Pugh in 1882, Mary Midgett in 1885, and Charles Schroder in 1889 (Crumbley and Ertzberger 1988). Rodanthe was the first village in Chicamacomico to get a post office; mail for the three villages was dropped off daily by boat. “From here [the mail boat] would go to Avon and then to Hatteras,” explained a villager. Once Frisco and Salvo got post offices, they were included in the route. The shallow waters of Pamlico Sound made it necessary for the mail boat to anchor offshore in a cut known as the “mail lead.” “There was a fellow who would take a small boat, shove out to the mail boat, and pick up the mail,” an old-timer reported. The shove skiff also ferried passengers to and from the mail boat. Once the highway was paved, mail boats were retired from service and postal items were delivered by truck. The Midgett brother’s bus line also helped out: “We carried mail back and forth on the bus,” reported Anderson Midgett.

#### **7.1.10. Commercial Fishing**

In the early 1900s, according to Charles Williams, the north end of Hatteras Island “had a big lot of fishermen and they didn’t make much money.” He explained that “They never got cash for the fish. They’d trade them off for potatoes and stuff like that. They’d quit their work [after a shipwreck] and everybody in the village would be a salvager” (Merrill 1979, 12).

Chicamacomico and Kinnakeet, located a good distance from either Oregon or Hatteras Inlet, were more isolated and therefore had a less developed economy than the southern villages.

Before the Civil War fishermen dried mullet and traded it with mainland plantations for corn to be ground at the village windmills.

Commercial fishing increased in significance at the turn of the century, but remained an opportunistic endeavor that still involved more trade than cash. Anderson Midgett carried clams in a Model-A Ford up to Currituck to trade for sweet and Irish potatoes in the late 1930s to early 40s; he and his brothers also caught and sold small clams to Neilus Midgett of the First Colony Inn in Nags Head, “the ones that were the size of a fifty cent piece. We would give him a hundred of them for fifty cent.”

Fish boats or “buy boats” such as the *Hattie Creef* would anchor offshore in Pamlico Sound. These boats would pick up fish that was ferried out in shove skiffs or held at offshore fish houses, such as Joseph Midgett’s. The *Hattie Creef* would “leave Elizabeth City and come to Wanchese,” explained an old-timer. “Then from Wanchese she would come here. From here she would go to Avon and then to Hatteras.” Another early buy boat was called the *Lloyd Junior*.

The Coast Guard began digging a channel and harbor on the sound side of Rodanthe in 1936, to the great convenience of fishermen who no longer had to haul fish out in the sound to meet buy-boats. There were about three fish houses operating at any given time in Rodanthe before the 1950s. One was owned by Etheridge Seafood in Wanchese, another by Ed Lyman who obtained it from Herbert Midgett, and a third was owned by Globe Fish Company in Elizabeth City. Fish houses competed for a fisherman’s catch in a bidding war:

Say you bid five cents a pound. The next might say five and a half cents, and then the next six. They would just holler it out. The boat was sitting in the middle of the creek, and they were bidding on [its contents]. Whoever was running the house for the Globe Fish Company would have to call up Elizabeth City on the old crank telephone to find out

what the Daniels brothers wanted you to pay for them. Whoever was the highest bidder, that boat would go there and unload.

Fish houses were the earliest facilities to ship in ice, delivered by boat after the turn of the century in 300-pound blocks. Ice was packed in sawdust and chipped off as needed. Once roads were improved and the Oregon Inlet Bridge was built, companies trucked ice in and fish out of Rodanthe.

A couple of small fish houses operated at the harbor until recent years, and today, in 2004, the few remaining commercial fishermen either “pack out” or unload their catch at Avon Seafood—the one remaining fish house in Kinnakeet,—or carry their fish via pickup trucks and coolers to Austin Seafood in Nags Head. A dealer in Nags Head counted one or two dozen remaining fishermen from the greater Chicamacomico region, “Juniors and Seniors, all of them,” and said that those who “stick” or keep fishing are a rare breed that want to fish for the sake of fishing; you “can’t educate him out of it.

Three camps were located near New Inlet, 5.6 miles north of the village; two were fish camps and one was St. Claire Midgett’s hunting camp on Jack Shoal grass. These camps were most active between 1933 and 1945 when New Inlet was open (Payne 1985).

#### **7.1.11. Livestock and Gardening**

Stock was grazing on the north end of Hatteras Island as early as 1630, as settlers discovered that fencing was expensive and “the most desirable rangelands were those surrounded by water” (DeBlieu 1998, 27). Rodanthe, like the rest of Hatteras Island and Ocracoke, managed herds of free ranging cattle, sheep, and horses until state legislators prohibited loose livestock on the island in 1935. A steer was shot periodically to “kill a beef” for meat; however, when legislation passed banning free ranging livestock on Hatteras Island in 1935, and statewide (i.e.,

Ocracoke) in 1957, many of the wilder cattle were shot and a bounty paid. Anderson Midgett recalled that their father raised hogs, chickens, horses, and a few cattle. “We would butcher the cattle right where they fell and cut them up. We’d take the meat through the villages and sell it to get rid of it, so it wouldn’t spoil. Everybody did that. Same way with the hogs. Everyone had little smoke houses.”

Livestock grazed on salt meadow grass, cord grass, and low shrubs. Because of the grazing habits of the large herds of animals, red-cedar timber activity of the 1800s, and the devastation of storms, Rodanthe was largely bare-beach. With the exception of Buxton and Frisco, few Hatteras locations had substantial foliage by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Dunbar 1956, 47).

Rodanthe families typically had small gardens where they grew an assortment of vegetables that survived a sandy soil, such as collards. People had groves of fig trees and yards full of peppermint; they canned their own vegetables and made fruit preserves.

#### **7.1.12. Significant Places**

Most Rodanthe natives have family burial plots located in a variety of places throughout the village, including at long-abandoned homeplaces, yards, and along the main road. These small cemeteries are sacred to villagers, and count as their most cherished spaces on the island. Joyce Rucker’s family plot, for example, is located where her childhood home once stood before it was moved. Her parents are buried there as well as her husband; although the old home is no longer there, she plans to be buried there as well.

Villagers feel strongly about their homeplaces, as many were born at home, and have fond memories of growing up in a particular house. It was not uncommon for houses to be moved on “bedways and rollers” after bad floods or when a family moved to a new village.

Some homeplaces today are abandoned and crumbling, fixed up and resided in by newcomers, changed into stores or shops, surrounded by modern homes built by family, or still lived in by a family member.

### **7.1.13. Rituals and Community Events**

#### **7.1.13.1. Old Christmas**

Rodanthe is only Outer Banks village that still hosts an “Old Christmas” celebration– a long-held tradition that is a defining feature of the northernmost community. “The custom is a carry-over from Epiphany and the Twelve days of Christmas celebrated by the first English settlers” (Wechter 1975, 150). Villagers held Old Christmas on January fifth, or Twelfth Night Eve, but in recent years celebrate it on the Saturday closest to January fifth for the convenience of out-of-town kin. Celebrating “two Christmases” can be traced to England's adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1752 which shortened the year by eleven days; this change went unnoticed and then ignored and resisted by isolated groups of Protestants including communities on the Outer Banks (Payne 1985).

Villagers offer a Biblical explanation of their celebration: Old Christmas is “twelve days after the regular Christmas because the wise men showed up after twelve days,” explained an islander. Early accounts indicate that there were religious overtones to the event that, to the dismay of some, have become lost in the merriment over the years.

In the old days...villagers were awakened by the sound of eerie music. The strange notes were produced by serenaders who carried homemade fifes and drums...Behind them marched Sunday school members. Every villager...joined in the procession, which by noon had reached...a table of monstrous proportions spread with all the “fixings” of Christmas...Prayers were said...and thanks were offered for God’s bountiful care... Honest, earnest religion was practiced daily. Old Christmas was a full culmination of it (Wechter 1975, 50).



It is not clear if islanders always donned costumes for the Old Christmas procession, but the earliest accounts described mummer-type practices as residents from all three Chicamacomico villages “disguised themselves with old stockings and clothes. The women would dress up as men and the men as women” (Midgett, Virginia 1979, 35). By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century blackface minstrels became part of the event, and the motley group would march door-to-door, begging for pies and other contributions to the community feast. Chickens were stolen the night before. “I [stole chickens] a couple of times. I got shot at one night, but I think they was shooting in the air. They expected their chickens to be raided - it was all the excitement you had.”

An important tradition in the Old Christmas procession was the beating of a pre-Revolutionary drum by a member of the Payne family. Although the drum and fife procession no longer exists, the story of the drum lives on. One legend of the drum is described by Charles Whedbee: a Scottish warrior was clinging to the drum after his ship went down in the Great Autumn Storm of 1757. He was spied in the waters off Rodanthe, and rescued by a man named Payne. The warrior, Donald McDonald, married into the community, but having no children of his own, left the drum to the Payne family, who have held a place of honor in the Old Christmas tradition ever since (Whedbee 1978). Another legend was told by Brad Payne, who was the drummer when interviewed in the 1950s. The Payne family, he explained, are descendants of three brothers from England who shipwrecked off Rodanthe. Two settled on the banks, while one settled in Hyde County. He discounted the idea that the drum washed ashore, claiming that it was used by a company of militia on the Lower Banks at Kinnakeet (Norfolk et al. 1951). A descendant of the Payne family who recently attended Old Christmas said that the drum was now “probably in somebody’s attic in Wanchese.”

At least as early as the 1920s Chicamacomico children would participate in the Old Christmas “children’s pageant”, organized by local school or Sunday school teachers. Elderly resident Lovie Midgett recalled the plays, costumes, candy pulls, and processions with noisemakers that occurred when she was a child. She also recalled a poem that she had learned for Old Christmas:

Of all the days folks celebrate, there’s one that’s simply grand,  
And that is good Old Christmas with joys on every hand.  
Of course, you can’t expect to find that joy all set on giving.  
You’ve got to stir around a bit with love instead of hating.  
If you can’t buy gifts just because your purse is flat,  
Don’t go fretting and worrying over that.  
There’s peace and joy a plenty and a message mighty sweet  
In the good Old Merry Christmas you can say to folks you meet.

The lifesaving/Coast Guard stations played a central role in “Bankers” lives, and Old Christmas was no exception. As many Chicamacomico men were Surfmen, the station crew spearheaded the Old Christmas event for many years. “The main event on Old Christmas would take place at two o’clock of a day,” reported an old-timer. “The crowd would gather up to the lifeboat station. (Surfman) Thomas Payne would take six apples and put one at a time on his head, and Captain Ben Midgett would shoot it off his head with a .22 rifle” (Midgett 1979, 36). The oyster shoot used to take place at the Chicamacomico Life Saving/Coast Guard station, and in fact was started by Surfman as a test of skill. Today it happens behind the community center that used to be Rodanthe School.

An early account described another practice that no longer exists: villagers would gather on the beach at midnight after the January fifth festivities to watch the “weird action of the cattle”:

[The cattle] would fall on their knees at midnight and make low murmuring noises as if they were praying. The people believed this was the proper time to celebrate because the animals played an important part in the nativity. After the cattle dispersed and returned

to the grassland, the folk would begin their journey home, stopping at several different houses for hot coffee and cold sweet tater pie (Midgett 1979, 37).

The highlight of Old Christmas in Rodanthe has long been the appearance of “Old Buck,” a mythological bull. No one is sure when Old Buck became a part of the celebration, but by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Surfman Ben Payne was taking “an old pole and putting a cow’s head on it,” leading a procession through the villages directly after the test of marksmanship. “We made “Old Buck” out of a steer’s head, including horns, and attached it to a wooden frame. A blanket was thrown over the frame to cover two men who provided legs and ambulation” (Midgett 1979, 37). Ben Payne’s son Bradford took over upon his death, and led Old Buck through the communities until passing the responsibility to John Herbert. Today, in 2004, John Herbert’s son drives up each year from Florida to assume his inherited obligation.

Around the time of the Depression, Old Christmas festivities were moved to the Rodanthe schoolhouse and included a square dance. Old Buck, still a cow’s head and skins with two men hidden below, made a surprise appearance during the dance, kicking and bucking to the glee and horror of children. It was considered lucky to touch Old Buck, but John Herbert fended off the crowd with a large staff. The occasional teenager who jumped on Old Buck’s back would be thrashed about and bucked off. John Herbert’s son recalled a year when carpet tacks were placed just below the blankets, point side up, surprising the boys who tried to mount Old Buck. Today Old Buck is still led around the room, but the old bull’s feet move slowly compared to his friskier days.

Like all mythological figures, Old Buck has mystical origins. The great black and white bull, like the hardiest of Bankers’ ancestors, was the only survivor of a ship that wrecked off Rodanthe during a terrible storm. A Chicamacomico surfman on watch duty “saw the beautiful

animal standing on the bank.” He fetched the rest of the crew, and after they all observed the magnificent creature, they turned all the cows loose to improve the gene pool.

The strange animal soon became acquainted with the cows and had a field day, siring many calves. Thereafter he became domesticated and was loved and respected by the natives. Each year on January fifth he was led through the villages. Sometimes children would ride on his back (Midgett 1979, 37).

But, one day Old Buck “became restless and trekked off to Trent woods looking for greener grass. There he was shot and killed by a hunter and became a legend” (Midgett 1979, 37). So, each January, the story goes, Old Buck comes out of Trent woods at Frisco to show up in Rodanthe and scare little children at Old Christmas. “That mysterious old steer would come out after bad children to scare the kids into being good.” Author Charles Whedbee records a slightly different version of this myth: Old Buck was “Bucca,” a great fighting bull brought to the New World by a Spaniard. The bull became possessed by a dragon during the journey; when the ship broke up off Hatteras, he swam to shore with two sailors hanging for dear life to his horns. The sailors married into the Hatteras Indian tribe, starting the first “Mustees” or fair-haired, mixed blood Indians. Old Buck disappeared into the Trent, appearing in Rodanthe each Old Christmas (Whedbee 1978).

Perhaps more frightening than Old Buck was another Old Christmas tradition that has become subdued in recent years: brawling. Men from various island communities, as well as brave souls who would venture over from Stumpy Point or Wanchese, would settle yearlong disputes with drunken fistfights. The fights broke out spontaneously throughout the day but particularly occurred at the dance when darkness fell and much alcohol had been consumed. Fights often revolved around women, but were also an expression of village rivalry. No hard feelings or resentments carried over into the next day; the goal was to start the year with a black

eye and a clean slate. Men “got their years worth of hard feelings over with in one night,” recalled an islander. “The next day they were best friends.”

In the early years, the Lifesaving Station crews procured much of the food for the community feast, heading up oyster expeditions and cooking chicken stews. However, once the celebration was moved to the Rodanthe school (now the Community Center), local women took over the cooking, making chicken and pastry as well as side dishes and dessert. The team of six or so women who had been in charge for many decades, however, announced in 2001 that they were retiring and passing the responsibility to their daughters. The majority of their daughters lived off-island, in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, or Elizabeth City. Yet, these “daughters of Rodanthe” rose to the challenge, and after a somewhat rough transition pledged not only to continue the Old Christmas tradition, but to resurrect some of the older practices such as children’s pageants and gift-giving. So, women who *do not reside* in Rodanthe are now the prime expeditors of Old Christmas. Rather than posing a threat to the bonds of culture and community, the commitment of these women to uphold and preserve local traditions has served to strengthen the ties that bind.

Old Christmas has long been a homecoming for far-flung residents serving at distant Coast Guard stations or other places of employment. Even those who have married non-islanders and have family responsibilities elsewhere point out that “two Christmases” enables them to spend the first elsewhere and Old Christmas at their “true home” in Rodanthe. “We always knew that there was no place on earth like Rodanthe at Old Christmas - it was the only place to be on this date,” said a daughter of a Coast Guardsmen who spent many years living away. Her sister added, “We all have flaws, and we all know each other’s flaws. But you come home, and none of that matters – you are loved for who you are.”

The way Old Christmas is expressed today captures Rodanthe's ambivalence toward tourism and modernity; it also highlights the village's tenacious spirit in wanting to retain their Chicamacomico identity in the face of rapid change (see Figures 7.1.4-9, below). The event is no longer a strictly local celebration whereby villagers catch the oysters, supply the chickens, or provide their own procession and square dance music. Within the last three decades organizers of Old Christmas began advertising the event to the general public and charging an admission fee. This was necessary in order to pay for the band (usually from the Norfolk area), the oysters (trucked in from Louisiana or Florida), and groceries (from Food Lion, a local chain store grocer) for the chicken and pastry dinner.

Although the event is open to the public, organizers do not aggressively push it as a tourist-friendly celebration and express the concern that off-island communities such as Nags Head or Norfolk would "steal" Old Christmas and make it a touristy spectacle if it was no longer held in Rodanthe. Old Christmas has the feel of attending someone else's family reunion, not only because most of the attendees are kin, but also because some of the customs are foreign if not inscrutable to the visitor. This alien feel, as well as hints of the old practice of brawling, have fueled a widespread misconception that non-locals are unwelcome at Old Christmas and are in danger of being attacked if they attend.

Yet, many of the native participants bemoan that Old Christmas is "not the same," having become too tame, commercialized, and mixed with unfamiliar faces. "It's not like it used to be where it was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Everybody would go out oystering and get a few oysters and either donate the chicken or steal them." At a recent Old Christmas a man announced to a long table of diners, "I thought I was the last Midgett alive!" a comical statement in light of the fact that virtually everyone at the table, not to mention at the event as a whole, was

a Midgett or from Midgett stock. People also wonder if Old Christmas is dying – some believe it will fade away within a few years, while others point to its long history and explain that it has always waxed and waned but continues nonetheless. Participants and organizers walk a tight rope between the modern and the traditional; the fact that the celebration incorporates both modern-day conveniences (e.g., store-bought food, imported band, admission fee) and traditional practices (e.g., “Old Buck,” kin-heavy attendance, minimal advertisement) suggests that Old Christmas is, among other things, a ritual of cultural pride and resistance on the Outer Banks. It is through long-standing cultural events, such as Old Christmas, that participants express their pride in who they are, where they are from, and the history and traditions that, despite hardships, have been passed down. In refusing to relinquish their unusual rite or make it innocuous enough to suit the visitor’s palate, Rodanthe villagers staunchly resist the forces of homogenization that are transforming coastal areas with an unprecedented degree of wealth and tourism.

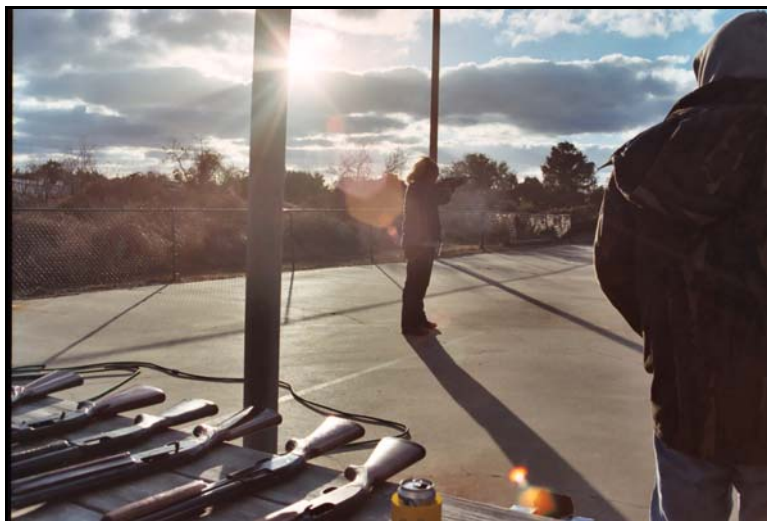


Figure 7.1.4. Old Christmas Oyster Shoot.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.1.5. Roasting Oysters at Old Christmas.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.1.6. Gulf Coast Oysters at Old Christmas.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.





Figure 7.1.7. Mac Midgett (Center) and Friends, Old Christmas.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake



Figure 7.1.8. Maggie Smith Cutting Pastry, Old Christmas.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.1.9. John Herbert Leading Old Buck, Old Christmas.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

#### **7.1.14. Coast Guard and the Military**

The first Midgett to settle in Rodanthe, according to family legend, was Matthew Midgett who washed ashore in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century after his ship wrecked during a hurricane. He married a local girl and had eight children, starting what would become the most common and influential name in the Chicamacomico region, as well as a clan of able-bodied seamen who would carry on a line of decorated Surfmens and Coast Guardsmen (DeBlieu 1998).

The Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station was established in 1874 in the village then known as North Chicamacomico. Six surfmen lived at the station from December until March for \$40 dollars per month. In 1883 the season was expanded from September 1 through April after many lives were lost in the fall months, and eventually the men were on duty year 'round (Stick 1958, 172). By 1899 the men received around \$60 dollars per month.

The first keeper was Bannister Midgett III, who held the post until he retired in 1916. In 1897 he received a box in the mail containing an internal combustion naphtha engine. Legend

has it that Bannister Midgett distrusted the new technology, and only tested the engine because of the crews' curiosity and enthusiasm. The engine roared into action, thrusting the skiff with Midgett aboard out into the sound. When he returned, to the astonishment of his men, he was rowing the skiff, and had beaten the engine with the oar (MacNeill 1958).

Rasmus Midgett of Rodanthe was awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal of Honor for single-handedly rescuing ten people off the shipwreck Priscilla in 1899. For all the prestige associated with such an honor, not a mention of this or his service in the Lifesaving Service is noted on his headstone, underscoring how much a part of everyday village life the business of saving lives was on the Outer Banks (Figure 7.1.10).



Figure 7.1.10. Rasmus and Mary Midgett Grave. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

In 1915 the Lifesaving Service was combined with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the U.S. Coast Guard; Surfmen were simply absorbed into the new organization. In its 80 years

of operation, the Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station was rebuilt once in 1911 and had a total of three keepers.

In 1918 the Chicamacomico Coast Guard station crew undertook one of the most daring rescues in the history of lifesaving. The 7,000 ton British tanker *Mirlo* exploded and split after hitting a mine or torpedo. Six surfmen (five Midgetts and one O'Neal) deployed their boat through the surf, rowed five miles offshore, and navigated through an ocean of oily fire and exploding debris to shuttle victims back to shore; after four trips, they had saved 42 of the 51 man crew. The six rescuers each earned Gold Lifesaving Medals from the British government, and the Grand Cross of the American Cross of Honor from the Coast Guard; "In the seventy-year history of the Coast Guard, officials have awarded only eleven Grand Crosses" (MacNeill 1958, 35).

One of the governor-appointed wreck commissioners of the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century was Israel Midgett from Rodanthe. He was in charge of the Chicamacomico Bank, and other commissioners took care of the Kinnakeet and Hatteras Banks. The wreck commissioner would undertake the "vendues" or shipwreck auctions.

In the early 1930s the state organized the effort to build "three parallel lines of ocean-front dunes from the North Carolina-Virginia border to Ocracoke Inlet" to stabilize the beach and prevent erosion (MacNeill 1958, 8). This project was turned over to the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Work Projects Administration in 1936, and camps were established at Chicamacomico and Buxton. WPA workers lived in bunkhouses placed on two barges that were tied up at Black Mar Gut, a mere creek before the Rodanthe harbor was dug in 1936. The men collected brush and limbs left over from the 1933 storm and piled it along the beach to collect blowing sand and build dunes. WPA laborers also built a new road in Chicamacomico from

topsoil collected from north Rodanthe; villagers with memories of World War I jokingly referred to it as the “Burma Road.” The dune-building project was administered by the National Park Service after the establishment of the National Seashore in 1953. Efforts to stabilize the beach ceased, however, in 1973 when the National Park Service changed its policy of intervention in favor of “letting nature take its course.”

### **7.1.15. Political Life**

The Lifesaving Stations of Hatteras and Ocracoke were integral to local politics, as village men vied to secure a job as Surfman, a government job with a steady paycheck. The station keeper held the most influence, and villagers supported those keepers who they believed would put in a good word for them or their kin. The role of local politics in lifesaving raised concerns in the early history of the service, expressed in a government report that warned of “control...by petty local politicians, whose aim was to subordinate the service to their personal ends; their method being to endeavor to pack the stations with their own creatures, without the slightest respect to use or competency” (Stick 1958, 171). Such problems were soon ironed out, however, and the Chicamacomico Station earned the utmost respect of government officials.

Political life in small communities can occur in unlikely places. Rodanthe is a case in point. Joseph McClellan “Mac” Midgett, a legendary figure known for his large stature, pirate-like appearance, daring-do antics, and past barroom and Old Christmas brawling, owns Island Convenience Store in Rodanthe with his wife and family. Even in the harsh winter months, residents can count on the store – a central meeting place in Chicamacomico - to be open with hot coffee, sandwiches, and carryout dinners. Although Mac Midgett cuts a gruff and almost frightening figure, he has a reputation for kind-heartedness, extending credit to residents who

need it and forgiving the debts of those who have fallen on especially hard times. He runs a large garage and towing company behind Island Convenience, and the sandy ridges behind the store are bedecked with junk cars. He has a few torn-up, greasy chairs in the garage, and the most important community business and gossip likely takes place there among the men who sit with Mt. Dew or lunch in hand. Mac Midgett's influence was evident in the 2004 election, as he won a seat on the Dare County Commission for the third time, beating a popular incumbent. Despite his political and business acumen, Mac Midgett still considers himself a commercial fisherman, and lives in a modest home built for \$15,000 in the early 1970s, revalued today at \$340,000. His political philosophy is old-guard, opposing zoning because people should "do what they want and mind their own business"; he reasons that well-connected residents would get around the zoning laws anyway (Nolan 2005, 13).

#### **7.1.16. Modernity and Perceptions of Change:**

Rodanthe natives, like other Outer Bankers, have witnessed tremendous change in the last 50 years. They have experienced the introduction of electricity, refrigeration, indoor plumbing, a paved road and bridge to the mainland, establishment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, tourism, mass communication, and an array of modern conveniences. Villagers share the region-wide ambivalence toward changes that have transformed island life, glad to have an increase in economic opportunities and a decrease in isolation, but wary that the underpinnings of their cultural identity are in danger of giving out. Nothing expresses this ambivalence more than the modern Old Christmas celebration described above.

Managed by the National Park Service, the beautifully restored Chicamacomico Lifesaving Station is open to visitors as an historical attraction. This Station is a symbol of the

village's history as a seafaring community and a present-day example of the complex relations between locals and non-locals and contested ideas of what makes a "community." Lists of early lifesaving crews are comprised mainly of those bearing the Midgett surname, and residents today can trace their ancestry to particular heroes of the pre-Coast Guard era who risked their lives to save victims of foundering and wrecked ships. But, few native residents staff the Lifesaving Station; the majority of those who volunteer their efforts moved to Hatteras Island from elsewhere and simply took an interest in local history. Some native residents express the opinion that their history has been co-opted by those who do not accurately represent it yet want to "be in charge," while some Lifesaving Station volunteers suggest that locals have little curiosity about their own history and lack the desire to "get involved." A local villager describes frustration toward non-locals' interpretation of family history: "They hear these stories and they think they know who the people are and they put it together and it's the greatest mess you ever heard when it comes out."

## 7.2. Waves

### 7.2.1. Name, Place, and Features

Formerly known as South Chicamacomico and, later, South Rodanthe, Waves is sandwiched between Salvo and Rodanthe on the north end of Hatteras Island (Figure 7.2.1.). The postal service rejected “South Chicamacomico” as too cumbersome and hard to spell; “Waves P.O.” was selected in 1939 with a “reference to the environment” (Payne 1985, 192). The fact that villagers referred to the “P.O.” after “Waves” for the next 50 years was a reminder that the name was picked for the post office; it also expressed a strong “reluctance to give up using the original name of Chicamacomico” (ibid).



Figure 7.2.1. Satellite Image of Waves.  
Source: NC Division of Marine Fisheries.

The village borders are no longer marked because, according to a resident, surfers and beachgoers “keep taking the Waves sign.” Like the other communities of Chicamacomico, it is difficult to detect a village amid the gift shops, rental homes, and under-construction subdivisions such as “Wind Over Waves.” But, in the past, borders were clear: “If you was out



in the sound in a boat,” explained a villager, “and looked back at the shoreline you would see three clumps. And you knew Waves was the middle one.” A Hatteras villager described Waves as “just some houses strung along,” but added that he had family there and was always made to feel welcomed. Early family surnames of Waves included Flower, Meekins, Midgett, O’Neal, Pugh, and Wallis (Stick 1958).

Old timers recall few trees in the village, and about “twelve, fifteen houses in each of these villages” (Figures 7.2.2-3.). Although some of the old homes are still inhabited or are crumbling behind brush and bushes, most natives live in modular homes, trailers, and brick ranch homes tucked along the highway and toward the sound. A villager stressed that people’s lives were oriented toward the sound, not the ocean:

Back in those days people didn’t build on the ocean side. They viewed it as foolish. Everybody built on [the sound] side. They knew eventually it was going to wash away over there. The bulk of their livelihood was on this sound. Most of their fishing was done in the sound.



Figure 7.2.2. Old Inhabited House in Waves. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.2.3. Old Post Office in Waves. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

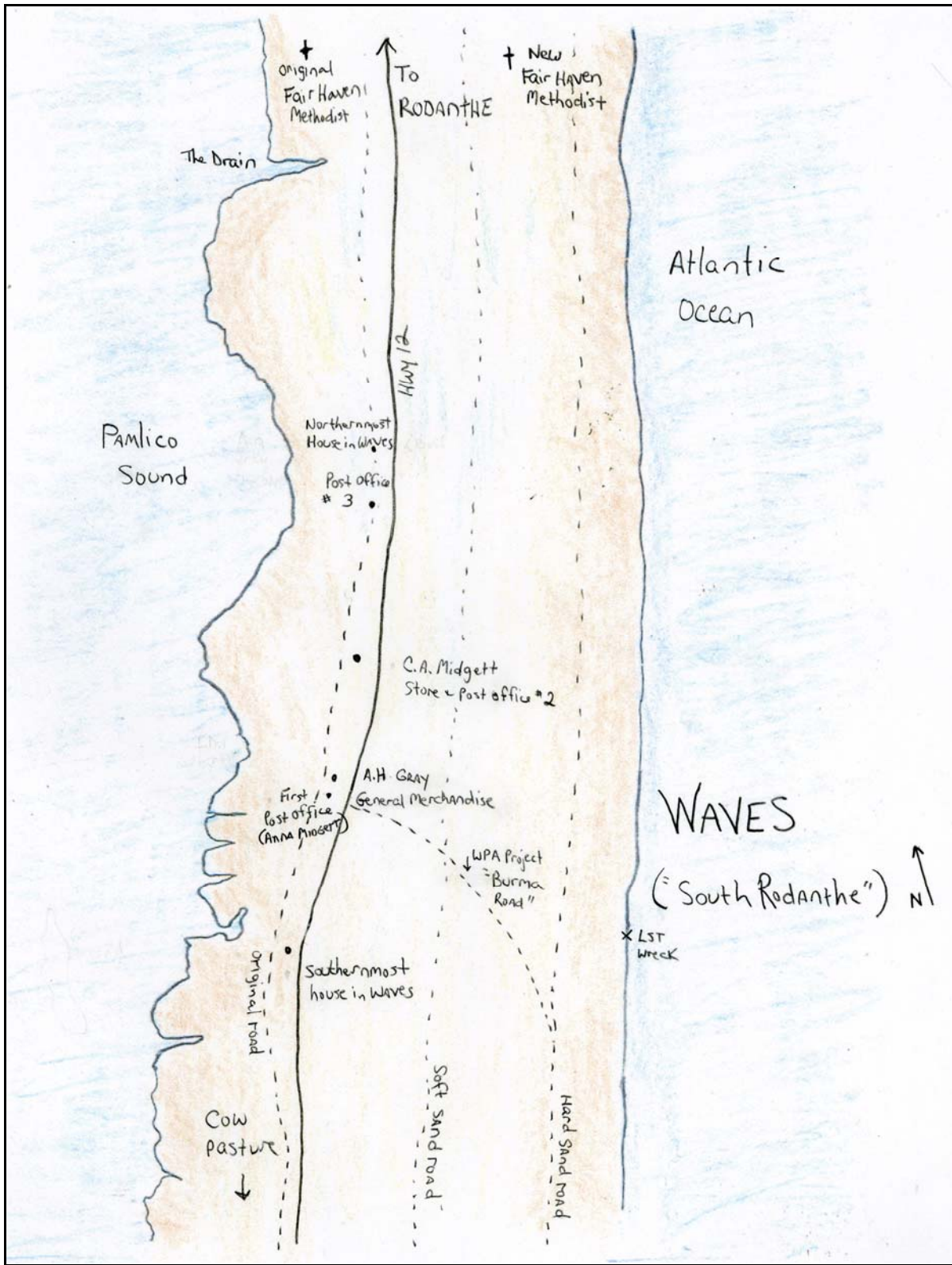
Large rental houses now dominate the landscape, both on the ocean side and in sections bordering the sound (see Figure 7.2.4, below).



Figure 7.2.4. Wind over Waves Development.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

There was once a sound-side cow pasture on the south end of Waves fenced off on three sides that doubled as a landing strip (Map 7.2). A doctor would sometimes fly in from Manteo to deliver babies or tend to the very ill, and the pilot had to stand by to keep the cows from “licking [the Piper Cub] to death.” Today “Wind Over Waves,” an upscale housing development, stands in the former pasture.

Like most villages of Hatteras and Ocracoke, Waves has a straight shoreline on the Atlantic side, and a curvy shoreline on the sound side, with numerous cuts, coves, creeks, islands, and shoals. Older fishermen worry that the names of the smaller creeks, unmarked on commercial charts, will disappear with them (see Salvo Chapter for Maps 8.9.2.-8.9.4.). Some of the creeks are natural and others are man-made. A resident, for example, hired an outfit to dig a small harbor off his sound side property in 1958 for \$500, a project that, if attempted today, would unlikely be approved by officials enforcing the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA). “A guy from Collington done it,” he explained. “Dug it with an old drag line bucket.”



Map 7.2. Waves Village with Historical Sites (not to scale). Sketch by B. Garrity-Blake.

### 7.2.2. Relation to Other Villages and Beyond

When asked how Waves differs from Rodanthe and Salvo, an old-timer laughed, “it *isn't* unique anymore.” He characterized each village in terms of who lived there:

It was never really unique when you get right down to it. It was just a village where people lived. In Rodanthe they had Midgetts, O’Neals, Meekins, and Grays. In Waves there was family of Grays and one family of O’Neals and the rest were all Midgetts. In Salvo they were primarily Paines, Hoopers, Grays. It was kind of clannish more or less. Each village had its own clan.

Waves and Rodanthe were intertwined in terms of kin; as the bulk of families in these two villages were Midgetts. Before World War II every family in Waves had the surname Midgett with the exception of an O’Neal and Gray household.

Villagers in Chicamacomico were no strangers to southern communities like Hatteras and Avon. Not only did the Midgett bus line help stitch the villages together; many families had relatives in more distant locations as well and visited them regularly. Someone explained that his mother was from Avon, and he grew up visiting there often. A Hatteras resident said that his mother was from Waves, and his father, a fisherman at the far south end of the island, would drive a Model-A through the sand clear to Chicamacomico to court her in the 1940’s. “Courting at the time meant sitting on the porch,” he added. “And turn around and drive back.” Because of his mother’s kin ties, he grew up spending much of his time in Waves.

School sports and teenage entertainment played a role in inter-community visiting. A villager who went to school in the late 1930s to mid 1940s recalled that the “only time we ever went (to the southern end of the island) was when I had ball games. Rodanthe School would go down to Avon or Hatteras to play.” School games, he added, only occurred on Saturday, as “there wasn’t any getting out of school to play games.” After the road was built, he made more frequent trips, and met his wife, a “Kinnakeeter,” at a dance at Tandy’s in Frisco.

### **7.2.3. School**

Waves, like Salvo and Rodanthe, once housed a one-room schoolhouse when the village was known as South Rodanthe. “It was a dilapidated looking building,” recalled an elderly resident. The schoolhouse in Waves was closed upon consolidation, when children of all three Chicamacomico villages began attending Rodanthe School in the early 1930s. Classes were tiny— a villager recalled graduating with five students in his class “and those five stayed together till we went to college.”

Until buses became available, children walked the two miles or so to school each day. Occasionally the tide would rise and make the journey difficult. When the bus couldn’t make it, the “Coast Guard station would come over and pick us up on big government horses, recalls one long-term resident. “They’d come in this wagon and bring us home.” The horses were otherwise used to haul Coast Guard rescue boats to the water; that the Guardsmen enlisted their horses to pull a wagonload of children to school is one of many examples illustrating how the Service was very much a part of everyday community life.

### **7.2.4. Stores**

Small general stores that proliferated in Banker villages in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were family-run operations. Some of the early 1900s stores in Waves included the C.A. Midgett store, and the A. H. Gray General Merchandise, run by Asa Gray. According to one of his grandsons, Asa Gray carried everything from “chicken feed to kerosene.” He eventually had a trucking business, taking orders for merchandise, picking it up off island, and delivering it to villagers:

He had a covered wagon truck. ... People in the neighborhood, they didn't have vehicles so they would come to my grandfather's store...and they would get in on Sunday mornings for church and Sunday school.

One of Asa Gray's sons worked at the general store as a child, and eventually became the "Pepsi Cola man." Soda became very popular on the island as an alternative to the poor-quality drinking water. He trucked Pepsi Cola from Elizabeth City to each village of Hatteras Island in the 1940s and early 1950s. "He had to come down on the sand roads, across the ferry," recalled his son. The ferry was little more than a "rinky-dink" wooden rig with a chain hoist that would maneuver a ramp for cars. "You had to try to get his attention by waving your arms because he sat on the north side and he would come across and get you. It was a full day to get up there and another to get back."

The Pepsi Cola man kept two-by-eights or two-by-twelves shoved underneath his truck for use in soft sand. "He would pull those boards out from underneath that truck and start boarding his way. He'd take one board and go a little ways, and another board." His son often accompanied him on the long Pepsi runs throughout the 1940s and 50s, and therefore visited all the stores on the island.

When I was a kid the grocery stores is where all the older men would hang out in the afternoon. It was gathering places you should say. Sometimes there would be ten, twelve, fourteen men in the afternoon sitting around talking, some of them playing dominos, checkers, and stuff like that.

The village stores were often forerunners in new technology. They were the earliest places in Waves to acquire telephones, Delco generators for electricity, and refrigeration. Stores were also village gathering places. A Waves native remembered when village men would gather at his great-grandfather's store to hear the boxing matches on the radio. A woman described her hard-of-hearing father who listened to the news by putting the handle of a fork between his teeth and resting his head against the radio. Radios were battery operated until electricity came to the

island in 1948. Stores were points of connection between villages, and conduits of communication. “When you were traveling you would typically stop – even after the place was paved and there’s not necessarily a reason to stop – to just kind of visit, maybe buy a Pepsi or a gallon of gas, chat for 20 minutes and go on. Keep up with what was going on.”

### **7.2.5. Pastimes and Childhood Activities**

With the absence of television and other modern distractions, children growing up in Waves relied on their imaginations. An elderly resident recalled “Play Pretties,” where she and her friends would collect broken glass from the many trash piles in the village and stick them in the sand to form little doll shapes. “The glass was their satin dresses,” she explained. Her daughter, growing up in the WWII era, said that she and her friends played pretend. “The three things that life revolved around here was church, school, and post office so you played all three. Everybody could preach, all kids could preach really good sermons.”

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, square dancing or house dances was still considered a sin by the Methodist church. “That was a long time ago when people had different ideas,” explained an elderly resident. By the 30s and 40s, however, island dances were common social events.

A villager stressed that there were so few age mates that all the kids more or less played in “one big clump,” crabbing, swimming, and exploring the beach.

We used to take old hoops that come off of barrels and a piece of copper wire and run it down the road and make it like we were driving a car. There wasn’t a whole lot to do. We had to amuse ourselves. We’d take bottles and play like they were cars; push them around. We would make roads, bridges and underpasses and stuff. There wasn’t a whole lot of money on the island so you didn’t get a whole lot. Mostly if you got something for Christmas it was clothes.

Some residents recalled exploring the beach during World War II and coming across great gobs of oil on the shore from tankers that had been attacked.



### **7.2.6. Medical Care**

Before paved roads villagers could seek physician help if they wanted to travel to Buxton or Hatteras village, almost a full day's trip. Chicamacomico residents relied mostly on local healers and midwives, and hired young girls to move in and assist new mothers. Orenda Midgett, who lived in Rodanthe, was one of the pre-World War II midwives who served expectant mothers in Waves. Midwives as far as Hatteras village recalled making runs as far as the villages at the northern end of the island, as did "Doc Folb," who worked out of Buxton in the 1920s. For emergencies Chicamacomico residents sought the help of the Lifesaving or Coast Guard Station servicemen, who could send communications and call for an air ambulance.

### **7.2.7. Early Transportation**

Elderly villagers recalled traveling about with carts pulled by a horse or ox. But, prior to the widespread use of automobiles, the "normal thing was a sailboat, horse, or you walked." Villagers took advantage of the Midgett bus line, and started riding a bus to Rodanthe School in the late 1930s, early 1940s. Once the road was paved, islanders were not necessarily free of difficulties. "The highway wasn't like it is now," reported a villager. "A lot of times the road would be washed out and the school bus would have to go out around it. And we'd push it, and it'd get stuck. We'd push harder coming back than getting to school." He remembered the "Midgett Express" taking the entire Methodist youth group to Hatteras for a church meeting for one dollar a head. Some islanders began getting their own cars in the mid-1930s, such as old Model-T and Model-A Fords.

### **7.2.7. Postal Service**

Waves was the last Hatteras island community to receive a post office, as it had long shared services with Rodanthe. The post office was established in 1939 with Anna E. Midgett as postmaster; she simply ran the service from her house. Villagers were reluctant to change their community's name to Waves, but Waves was the only community that seems to have adopted a name with an eye toward tourism. A man explained that his aunt, Anna Midgett, had chosen the name because the community does "have a lot of waves and storms." Like villagers elsewhere, a highlight in the day for Waves residents was mail call. A woman recalled rushing to the post office early to visit everybody:

But, the best thing was you knew each piece of mail everybody got. The postmaster would call out the names of every piece of mail so you knew who got a letter and who got a package. The packages were usually from Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward.

After Anna Midgett retired, the post office was run from C.A. Midgett's general store. According to a Waves resident, the post office then moved four more times: first, to a Mr. Edwards' residence in the north part of the village, then to two different locations in Rodanthe as part of the Rodanthe/Waves post office, and finally to the present location as the Rodanthe-Waves-Salvo post office.

### **7.2.8. Commercial Fishing**

Almost everyone in the Chicamacomico region was involved in commercial fishing, but not necessarily as a full-time endeavor. "Most men associated with commercial fishing had something to fall back on," explained a resident. "If you had some nets, you set them; come along later and check them." Fishermen launched small skiffs in the sound, dories in the ocean, or kept larger boats at Hatteras or Oregon Inlets; the shallow waters and inconvenient location of

Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo made it prohibitive for keeping sizeable vessels nearby. No fish buyers worked out of Waves. Although a couple small fish houses operated in Salvo, most of the commerce took place in Rodanthe where buyers would bid on catches of fish.

Waves fishermen did a little crabbing, and traveled to Oregon Inlet and Pea Island or Hatteras and Ocracoke Inlets to clam, but according to an old-timer clams have never been found in any significant quantity off Chicamacomico. Clams were found by “signing,” the process of searching for a keyhole shaped indentation in the sand. Some fishermen raked clams, hand dug clams, even giggered for the bivalves: a “straight prong gig” was jabbed on the keyhole sign and the clams would “pop out of the hole.”

Fishermen have long worked both the sound and the ocean. In the sound they use gillnets and pound nets to target bluefish, summer flounder, trout, and mackerel (see Appendix 1). In the ocean they use sink nets offshore or work from small beach dories to seine for spot in September and speckled trout, striped bass, and puppy drum in late fall/early winter. Fisherman I.D. Midget of Waves, who still operates “a pretty smart” dory described the mechanization of the fishery (Figure 7.2.5):

Now it’s motorized. But back when I started it was oars. They’d put the net in the boat, row out, come back ashore. [The net] was pulled by hand. During World War II four-wheel drives begin to come out, so everybody bought surplus vehicles to pull their nets out and to pull their dories with.



Figure 7.2.5. I.D. Midgett and Outer Banks Dory. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

A fisherman's son bought an old 32-foot sailing shad boat with a round stern from across the sound in Stumpy Point. "Had the old cypress knees in it for timbers," he said, "and the stem and stern was rotted out of it." Their neighbor offered to replace the stem and stern for material costs only, and fixed it within a year. But the traditional workboat was not suited for the type of fishing off the shallows of Hatteras:

The old man [that he bought it from] had been using [the shad boat] for about 60 years. He had put a motor in it, an engine. It worked all right on that side of the sound, Stumpy Point, because along the shore over there they have fairly deep water. But on this side of the sound it was no good because the draft was too deep. So everywhere you went you were aground.

Stumpy Point fishermen once set shad nets on the back edge of the reef off Chicamacomico.

After the American shad became scarce in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stumpy Pointers started setting pound nets "for butter fish, croakers, and trout" but did not compete with

Chicamacomico fishermen, as they were not yet utilizing pound nets but instead harvested with gillnets.

A villager recalled watching his great grandmother in the house tying cotton and linen nets from a skein of twine, a common industry among islanders until multifilament nylon was introduced in the 1950s. Houses were typically built with a long hall running down the center of them, and this was where people would tie nets in the winter or at night. His great grandmother “could get her hand going so fast tying that net that you could hardly see her hand or...the needle.”

She had four or five pins that would hold the twine. She had needles made of little bamboo. My grandfather would make the gauges for her, and that would determine the size of the mesh that the net would be. She would say, “Well I’m going to tie ten yards before I go to bed” or “before dinner today I’ll tie five more yards.” She had a piece of twine going over to one of the old timey doorknobs, and she would have a basket sitting there. She would tie out so far, maybe tie five or six yards out, and then move it up closer to the doorknob.

“Tying” net refers to making the net from twine, while “hanging” net is attaching corks to the top and lead weights to the bottom. Pre-WWII fishermen did not have to concern themselves with regulatory mesh sizes, but fished with 25 or 30 yards, considerably smaller than nets today. The inexpensive and easily obtained and maintained multifilament nets represented a significant change for fishermen.

Many fishermen shifted to “drop nets” –nets anchored in such a way to catch mid- to deep-water schools– in the early 1980s. This shift occurred primarily because of a large showing of gray trout that turned into a ten year-long run, and the introduction of a hydraulic stern-placed net reel that made “pulling in by hand” a thing of the past. Drop netters converged in Hatteras village from Wanchese, Stumpy Point, and Engelhard because the boats were relatively small (26-25 feet) and in the winter prevailing northeast or northwest winds made it “kind of rough up

on the north side.” The crews worked the ocean and sound from October through January. Rudy Gray of Waves modified his rig to include a T-shaped stern roller that helped feed the net from the reel to the water:

When my boat came in, it was like a gathering. People coming to take a look at the gill net reel plus the stern roller that I had custom made for that boat. They had seen that reel before [in Hatteras] but this here was a real nice gill net reel made out of fiberglass. It held 2,000 yards of netting that we used in the ocean. You go out there and there'd be two guys straining to pull back the nets by hand with a lot of fish in them. But, the gill net reel just sat there doing all the work. So, some of the local guys started building those gill net reels, making them out of wood. Today, we have a modern drop net fleet.

Two years ago, in 2002, Gray decided to switch from commercial fishing to charter boat fishing, while his brother remained a commercial fisherman. His decision was based on the bleak outlook for the fishing industry, and increased restrictions. “Everything was downhill,” he explained. “There was no uphill anymore.” He enjoys his customers, especially children. “I love to see children catch fish. That can really get my heart a thumping.” He finds charter boat fishing easier in his middle-aged years, but is not immune to the impact of restrictions.

Particularly painful are red drum restrictions that prevent his customers – and himself – from keeping the “old drum,” mature drum fish that are more than twenty-seven inches long. Old drum is a key ingredient in a traditional and beloved Outer Banks dish. “You got to have those big fish to make that drum stew or a muddle. We take and thicken ours and make a gravy into it. We put it over the top of the cornbread.” A fish dealer added, “You can't drink whiskey with that. If you did, you'd die [of pleasure]!”

I.D. Midgett of Waves complained that the government was “limiting us to death. We're a dying breed, I can assure you that.” Fishing was merely supplemental to his retirement from the ferry service, and he “surely wouldn't advise a young man to go into it.” His son, however, is now, in 2004, one of the island's few remaining full-time commercial fishermen. Most career

fishermen have either been forced to find additional sources of income due to dwindling profits or, finding the service-industry more lucrative, have chosen to have non-fishing jobs on the side. Midgett remarked that some of his grandchildren enjoyed fishing with him, while a couple of others “didn’t want to be around the boat. More power to them.”

I think a way of life is going to be lost if nothing else. A heritage is going to be lost. Other than that it’s just like everything else. If it’s not productive do away with it. Like the cowboy, he’s gone, so the fishermen are going to be gone too. Farmers and fishermen always had a hard time. The farmer gets subsidized, but the fisherman doesn’t get anything except hard time.

### **7.2.9. Hunting**

Waves residents have a long history of waterfowl hunting; in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century men supplemented their fishing income by market hunting for northern markets. When market hunting was outlawed upon the passing of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the era of hunting lodges began, and local men were employed by wealthy Yankee sportsmen as guides. A villager noted that the oyster shoot at Old Christmas, where men demonstrated their skills as marksmen, was a carryover from the days when waterfowl hunting was a way of life. “People were really quite good shots. They used to shoot geese and bag them off and send them off. Those people are long gone.” “Bag them off” and “send them off” refers to the days of market-hunting when islanders made a good living commercial hunting; waterfowl was salted and packed for shipping to northern markets such as Baltimore and New York.

### **7.2.10. Livestock and Gardening**

Once free-roaming stock was prohibited on Hatteras Island by state legislation in 1935, a villager kept about fifty head of cattle in a sizeable pasture on the south end of Waves. The

pasture extended from the present day post office to Salvo, serving as a border between the communities. “He had the cow pen, but he didn’t own the land,” said a relative. “I guess people let him use it.” An old-timer explained that they had to “take all the old critters and put them in a pen because they were eating up all the vegetation, causing erosion real bad.”

We had a man that had the cow pen [between Salvo and Waves]. He would kill a beef, and sell it through the neighborhood here. I can remember him selling mom a piece of beef. People in the neighborhood also had hogs. My dad had hogs, and they would kill them, and he’d smoke his own bacon and hams.

A villager pointed out that the cost of keeping livestock became prohibitive for islanders once they had to pen them up and feed them.

There had been wild herds running here and the people used to kill a cow and divvy it up because there was no refrigeration or anything so you had to use it immediately. In the early 20s when cars got on the roads, they started having accidents with the life stock. The state passed a law that you had to pen up your livestock. So, penned, there was no way to feed them. So, they just killed them off.

#### **7.2.11. Perceptions of Environment and Storms**

Bankers paid careful attention to the weather, wind, and tides; it was important for fishermen to judge the most auspicious time for boating and harvesting. A villager recalled his father studying the moon and tides before he drove his car anywhere: “If the moon was about south or near south, it was about low tide. And to travel on the beach, it would be just as hard as it could be.”

A Waves native recalled the 1962 Ash Wednesday storm, as he was at the north end of the island when the sea broke through and swamped his car. He took refuge at the Pea Island lifesaving station until the tide went down, and waded home seven miles. “In these three villages there wasn’t any flooding except for a little bit in the very north end of Rodanthe,” he said. “Up where the island convenience store is at now is about as far as the tide went down.”



Bankers referred to the hard-packed sand at low tide as “the wash”; this was the preferable route before paved roads. The “bank of beach” referred to the sandy dry portion at high tide. Fishermen called the area where water forms a riptide and rushes offshore between shoals an “outlet,” and a gust of wind was a “flaw.”

#### **7.2.12. Significant Places**

Like many islanders, families from Waves expressed strong sentiment toward burial grounds and homeplaces. Small graveyards seem to be scattered everywhere but church grounds. Church graveyards were unnecessary, as families buried their own in their yards or in small, family-owned cemeteries. Marked and unmarked graves can be found in long-gone settlements, now federal parkland; these graves range from a well-kept plot in the Salvo recreational area to an overgrown plot at Little Kinnakeet; to unmarked and wash-away graves claimed by sound erosion. Graveyards follow the general land use patterns of Banker’ communities, comprising a patchwork hodge-podge pattern of interesting juxtapositions. D. Lance Midgett’s father, for example, is buried in a family plot now juxtaposed to a campground along a chain link fence (Figure 7.2.6). His father had paid a very small sum to another villager for land that can hold about six graves. Although the family cemetery is becoming something of a tourist site, he visits the site regularly.



Figure 7.2.6. D. Lance Midgett of Waves at Father's Grave. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Some people still live in the house they were born in or, like Nellie Farrow's daughter Jackie Weinberg, have moved back to their childhood home. Islanders are proud of the portions of their homes that were constructed from the remains of shipwrecks (Figure 7.2.7.):

My grandfather bought this house in 1902 from his uncle. It's old – the lumber isn't two-by-four but three-by-five or something, not dressed. The floor joists are all different sizes, heavy lumber. Probably came off a wooden ship. A piling off the back porch was a mast off a sailing ship that wrecked off Salvo.



Figure 7.2.7. Jackie Weinberg and Mother Nellie Farrow of Waves.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

A villager knew of old trash piles that have been dug up, revealing hundreds of patent medicine bottles and kitchen items. One such pile was in his backyard.

A long-vanished landmark that held fond memories for Waves residents was the LST landing craft carrier, which broke from a tug in 1947 and wrecked. A resident's grandfather provided room and board for some of the salvage workers, who in three months burned and scrapped the ship. Many recall when the vessel went down, and remember swimming and diving off it: "I even have pictures of us," said a resident. "I know it has to be on a Sunday in dresses taking pictures of each other on this wrecked LST."

### **7.2.13. Rituals and Community Events**

Waves' villagers have long been involved in Rodanthe's Old Christmas celebration and participated in a holiday exchange of sorts. "People from Rodanthe might come down here for

Christmas for the day and then for Old Christmas, people down here would go up there.” In the early 1910s and 20s Waves’ residents would join the procession where people would “disguise” and go from village to village, house to house, singing and playing music. An elderly resident said that she quit going to the celebration because of the brawls, but continued to spend the day in Rodanthe. “You still ate with your friends. Nobody in Waves had anything special on Old Christmas, so I went up there.”

Other community events centered on religious or family rites, such as funerals. Islanders recalled when the dead were shrouded and laid out in the parlor. Family and friends “sat up with the dead” throughout the night. A villager confided that her father was among the first to be embalmed, a process that took place at home in his bedroom. Before WWII the closest funeral home was in Manteo, but “nobody was ever carried there.”

Weddings were not big celebrations. It was not uncommon for couples to get married before a justice of the peace, and church weddings were simple affairs. A woman recalled riding to her brother’s wedding as a little girl on a horse and cart, but her parents stayed home.

#### **7.2.14. National Park Service**

Villagers have romantic memories of pre-National Seashore days of freedom when “people could go to the beach anywhere – they had the full run of everything, then, as did the cattle.” But at the same time they are quick to point out that the National Park Service has helped prevent rampant development of beach homes all along the island beaches that is occurring within village borders.

A few Bankers recalled the transition period and meetings between community members and park officials. “Everybody was dead set against the Park Service,” a villager said, describing

“heated arguments” at meetings in the Rodanthe Community building and Manteo. He reflected that people were suspicious of the government and frightened of the “unknown.” He recalled that people were upset with the property transfer and the price they were offered for their land. But, he scanned the horizon and the several new homes being built and said, “The only thing I’m sorry of is that they didn’t take more.”

### **7.2.15. Coast Guard and the Military**

The closest Lifesaving/Coast Guard station to Waves was the Gull Shoal Station south of Salvo and the Chicamacomico Station in Rodanthe. The business of saving lives was the first formal occupation for many Chicamacomico families. A Waves’ resident pointed out that before the life saving stations were established villagers were “fishermen or whatever they could find to do.” His grandfather was stationed at one of the life saving stations, and his father carried on that tradition by joining the Coast Guard. Most families can recount an impressive genealogy of ancestors and relatives that served in this capacity. Many ferry workers were once members of the Coast Guard as well, and almost everyone commercial fished at one time or another. “That was about it. Coast Guard and fishing was about it - or you went off somewhere and got a job.”

“The Coast Guard is a very big part of our lives,” agreed a neighbor. The Coast Guard was not only a significant source of employment, but served to help villagers in everyday ways as well. “Any problems, we didn’t call for a sheriff – the only sheriff’s office was in Manteo so all we had was the Coast Guard.” Because so many Hatteras Islanders served in the Coast Guard, the stations had somewhat of a warm, family-like atmosphere toward islanders traveling and stopping in. The stations were famous for their abundant meals and willingness to feed islanders who were stuck in the sand or trapped in a storm.

My dad built a thirty-two foot shrimp boat. So everyone says, well how are you going to get that boat to the water? He said don't worry about it, I'll get it to the water. So he called the Coast Guard and they moved that boat - dug right down and pulled it to the water with an amphibious duck, a World War II boat on wheels.

The Coast Guard sent out regular beach patrols in search of ships in trouble, and this too was beneficial to villagers who found themselves stranded on isolated stretches of sand. "One guy would be coming from one station, the other from the other station and they would meet. If you broke down and started walking it wouldn't be too long before you met someone on patrol."

### **7.2.16. Modernity and Perceptions of Change**

Several residents of Waves noted that people's sense of time has changed greatly in the past few decades, as well as a sense of responsibility toward others. "People are busier," complained a resident. "You don't have time for each other. I can ask people about their relatives and they don't know anything. They haven't seen them in days." Lost is the luxury of "visiting."

There isn't any community anymore. Use to, everybody went and visited everybody else. That was the big highlight, the visiting. Now nobody visits anymore. In fact you don't even know your next-door neighbor.

A woman pointed out that there were fewer houses in the past, "so in a day's time you probably could go in every house for a pop visit at least. People don't have that time now." Ironically, the convenience of the paved highway and bridge has made it too easy for people to drive off-island to meet their needs, rather than depend on one another.

I spend all my time in the car. If I want anything I'm usually up the beach or in Manteo to get it, and sometimes I go three or four times a week which takes a lot of time. You didn't do that when you had to catch a ferry.

The sheer growth in numbers of people was cited as one of the biggest changes facing Chicamacomico. A villager observed that there had been a "semi-building boom" in the 1980s,

and then the water plant was built in 1995; the transition to “city water” is viewed by residents as a critical “tipping point” toward accelerated housing development. One villager cited 2001 as the start of the “biggest boom of all” in new housing and developments, speculating that the post-September 11, 2001 economy was key, with investors skittish about the lackluster stock market and therefore putting their capital in the “sure-thing” property and housing market. Low mortgage rates contributed to this trend, as did soaring property values and new building policies. For example, people had been required to have at least 20,000 feet of land to build when they were on a well system, but the lot-size requirement was recently reduced, allowing for denser development.

A fisherman reflected on the island’s apparent prosperity and the chance of future controls on development. “The money is what makes things go. Most of the growth is outside developers coming in.” He added that developers “could care less about the island. All they are interested in is money, build it and go.”

## 7.3. Salvo

### 7.3.1. Name, Place, and Features

Salvo, originally “Clarks” or “Clarksville,” is the southernmost village of the three northern Chicamacomico settlements (Figure 7.3.1). A Union ship commander is reported to have spotted the settlement from sea while heading north, and asked his crew for the name of the village. Checking the chart, the crew found none. The captain ordered his men to "give it a salvo anyway," which is a simultaneous firing of cannons. One of the crewmen wrote "salvo" on the chart, and this was noted by others and used on later maps. The postal service simply chose the name Salvo from maps when the office was established in 1901 (Payne 1985, 164).



Figure 7.3.1. Satellite Image of Salvo.  
Source: NC Division of Marine Fisheries.

There were nine families that present-day residents of Salvo consider to be their founding members: the Cyrus Gray, Abram Hooper, Ezekiel Whidbee, Sam Austin, William Wellington Hooper, Lorenzo Farrow, Graves Midgett, John Roper Douglas, and Kadugan Gray families (Salvo Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary 2002). William Wellington Hooper was



known for telling his grandchildren that he had washed ashore in a barrel. He, like many Hatteras Islanders, was a Union sympathizer, and fought for the north during the Civil War (ibid).

Salvo, five feet above sea level, had a population of 77 in 1910; by 1940, it had a population of 98 people (Dunbar 1956). In the mid-1950s geographer Gary Dunbar predicted that the population would level off at 100, and dubbed Salvo “a fishing village, with little cause for tourists to stop” (ibid, 175). These predictions have proven off-the-mark, as more residents earn their living from tourism than from fishing, and the proliferation of “mini-hotel” beach homes have caused the population to increase considerably (Figures 7.3.2-3.). Although village-specific population figures are not offered, the 2000 Census listed 482 living units in Salvo, underscoring the growth of the village (Dare County Land Use Plan 2002).



Figure 7.3.2. New Beachfront “Rental Machine” in Salvo.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.3.3. Development on the South Edge of Salvo.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

As with Waves and Rodanthe, it is hard to detect a core village amid the towering rental houses, gift shops, campgrounds, and convenience stores. Upon closer inspection, however, modest homes are here and there along Highway 12, as well as one of the smallest post offices in the country. Few natives live near the ocean beach, following traditional patterns of keeping away from the moody sea. According to Burt Hooper, Salvo was home to 15 houses in 1944, owned by Hoopers, Grays, Paynes, and Midgetts. Shipwrecks have been incorporated into the neighborhood, as residents have long salvaged lumber and other parts of ships and used them in house construction. Long gone are fences between each house bridged by four-step stiles, designed to let people pass from yard to yard while keeping livestock out.

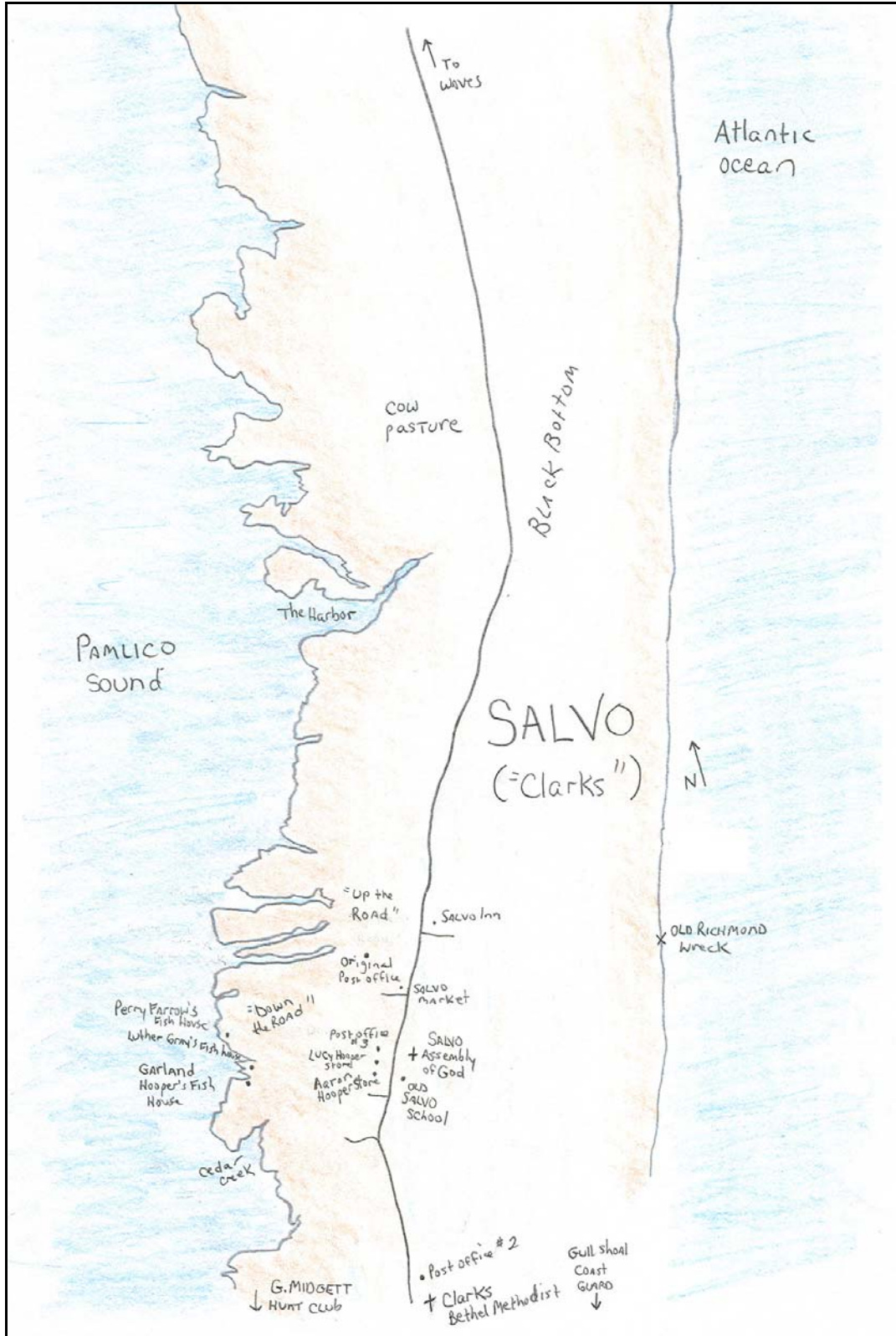
Well water tasted bad in the Chicamacomico region. Before electricity, water was extracted by a hand pump or gathered with a cistern.

We used to have an old hand pump, and you brought in a pail of water, and there was a ladle sitting in a white porcelain bucket. Everybody drank out of the same dipper. If one person got a cold, everybody got the cold.

A villager noted that water “purified itself every seven days,” and improved in taste depending on the season. Water in the month of May “rots or stinks,” so households had to “have the gutter unhooked” so the diverted water would run into the yard instead of the cistern where the drinking water was stored. Water collected in a tank would get a shot of chlorine bleach to keep mosquito larvae or “wigglers” out.

A hard-packed area in Salvo known as Black Bottom had little vegetation; local legend has it that too much blood was spilled during the Civil War, rendering it barren (Payne 1985) (Map 7.3). Before World War II Chicamacomico residents held automobile races there, until the 1944 storm covered it in sand and allowed vegetation to grow.

An important landmark in Salvo juts out of the Atlantic waters and is within swimming distance of shore: the propeller shaft of the *Old Richmond*, a 19<sup>th</sup> century steam vessel or side-wheeler that some locals believe burned offshore and littered the beach with bodies during the Civil War. An illustration of wreck graces the cover of the Salvo Volunteer Fire Department cookbook.



Map 7.3. Salvo Village with Historical Sites (not to scale).  
Sketch by B. Garrity-Blake.

### 7.3.2. Relation to Other Villages and Beyond

Whereas Rodanthe and Waves were interconnected, many viewed Salvo as the “odd one out” in Chicamacomico, with a reputation for being more clannish and independent than the others. Village rivalries existed and were sometimes settled during Old Christmas brawls, yet it is clear that Salvo was part of a greater community. A villager stressed that families and communities relied on each other too much for any rivalries to be taken seriously:

Everybody depended on each other. If you had to put a roof on your house, everybody just come helped you put it on. Every Saturday they would pull them sailboats out and helped each other turn them bottom up, clean the bottom and they would take all their nets up and lime them, and lime the sails. Get them all snow white and clean.

Mutual-dependency was a survival skill for islanders in all aspects of everyday life, and particularly in times of emergency. A villager recalled how neighbors would rally to prevent a fire from spreading years before the Salvo Volunteer Fire Department was established in 1965:

One house close to the road here caught fire and people would pour water onto the bed quilts and put it on the roof to try and save surrounding houses, it was that hot. Everybody in the neighborhood was fighting it. The Coast Guard from Rodanthe came down to help too. That’s all we could do was tote water. Everybody’s pumps around here was dry.

The history of the fire departments in the Chicamacomico region underscores a certain divide between Salvo and the two villages to the north. Initially there was one fire department, the Chicamacomico Voluntary Fire Department (VFD), but then Salvo broke away.

We all started out together, then we never seem to get along together. Half the guys wanting to do this and half that. So all the men in Salvo and a few of them up there, they said well we’ll build our own. So went and got us a franchise and built our own.

Despite the somewhat rocky history between the Chicamacomico and Salvo VFD’s, members stressed that all the volunteers train together, assist one another, and are friends. “We built a whole station with fish fries,” a member of the Ladies Auxiliary pointed out. They held the event each Easter and Labor Day weekend, catering to tourists. For \$25 dollars they

purchased a fire truck, and had the property for the station donated. The women held the fish fries and raffles annually until the department began receiving tax revenue. Like the women who cooked for Old Christmas in Rodanthe, the auxiliary women had particular cooking tasks and talents. “I’d take the potatoes and divide them up, and the women would peel, dice, and boil them. Jean would mix potato salad, and we all shredded the cabbage. We had to figure up for 500 people how many hushpuppies it would take.” Men volunteered to fry the trout or bluefish.

Salvo residents share with other islanders a deep love for their home communities and culture. A man who left the island to work at a shipyard in Mann’s Harbor for over 35 years stressed that he frequently returned throughout his life. “I never really considered that place my home; always thought of Salvo as home.”

### **7.3.3. School**

Although Salvo once had its own schoolhouse, it was closed in the 1930s upon consolidation of the three Chicamacomico communities. An old-timer recalled attending the Rodanthe School when there was one teacher for all the grades. A man explained that he was the school bus driver for Rodanthe School in the 1940s when he graduated from 10<sup>th</sup> grade at age 16. “I drove six months without any driver’s license,” he laughed, underscoring how informally things were done on Hatteras Island:

I was sixteen. They didn’t have any highway down here so you didn’t have a driver’s license and you didn’t have any license on your car really. They called us to Manteo for a bus training session. I drove all up and down them roads and [the official] said, you’ve done a lot of driving! I said yes ma’am quite a bit. She said “Let me have your driver’s license so I can put the number on you bus license.” I said, Lady, I don’t have a driver’s license. She about fainted. So she gave me papers and my dad and signed them so I could get a driver’s license.

He drove the school bus for four years, mainly along the interior sandy roads. “We took the dual wheels off of it,” he recollected. “We cut the governor off the engine so it would have more power. We turned some of the pressure down in the tires so it would go in the sand.”

When the Chicamacomico schools consolidated in the 1930s, it likely eased rivalries between villages and diminished any aura of clannishness. Yet, distinctions remained. Bankers claimed to detect a dialect difference between Salvo, Waves, and Rodanthe, even to this day, as well as the other villages. Although specific examples were lacking, they said that they could tell where a person was from by the way they talked.

Even after consolidation to one Chicamacomico school, classes were tiny. A Salvo villager proudly proclaimed that he was one of the last graduating classes of Rodanthe School before the “big” consolidation of all island schools; in 1950 he was valedictorian in a class of seven.

#### **7.3.4. Church**

A primary feature distinguishing the village of Salvo from neighboring Waves and Rodanthe is church. Whereas Waves and Rodanthe share a Methodist church, Salvo has its own, Clarks Bethel. Established in 1886 as “Clarks Bethel Episcopal South,” the name was changed to “Clarks Bethel” in 1892. It was destroyed in the 1944 storm but rebuilt the following year. Salvo also has a Pentecostal Assembly of God church whose congregation was originally Methodist. Myrtle Chambers of Elizabeth City began the Assembly of God faith on the Banks; she and her husband Charles Chambers first introduced the fervent style of worshiping in Avon after holding a tent revival on the beach. They began the Glad Tidings Gospel Tabernacle church in 1927. The congregation met in peoples’ homes until a church was built in 1935 by the

members themselves, including the preacher, from timbers of the *G.A. Kohler* shipwreck of 1933. The first service was held October 6, 1935. The new church was called “The Little Church with the Big God,” and later changed to “Salvo Assembly of God.” Salvo resident Lucy Hooper helped build the church and preached to the congregation until her death in 1975. Hooper also fished her own nets, built her own house and boat, and ran a sweet shop (Salvo Volunteer Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary 2002).

Miss Chambers came in with her tent and had this revival. It all had to be Methodist who were going to it because that’s all they were. She led them a little differently. Methodists were not lively in their worship, and that was the beginning of the Assembly churches here. She split the [Methodist] church in Avon. The same thing happened at Salvo but she didn’t get anybody from Rodanthe.

“The original charter of the Methodist church,” explained a member, “was used as a guide to draw out the charter for the Assembly of God.” Members attended the Salvo Assembly of God as much as three days a week. A man raised in the church described the Assembly doctrine as very strict, “You do this or do that and you go straight to hell.” But others pointed out that the church was not as strict as it used to be.

They’re all more liberal than what they used to be. You don’t hear many of the old-fashioned fire and brimstone sermons like you used to. It’s love, love, love, love, love, now. Let me tell you, God is love, that’s a verse in the Bible, but he’s also God of judgment. He’s our mediator now, but he’ll be our judge later.

A woman raised in the Methodist church but married into the Pentecostal described the different style of worship: “[The Methodists] don’t want you to talk in tongues, and they don’t like clapping your hands, and such stuff as that,” while the Assembly of God congregation rejoiced in a more effervescent manner. “I believe in the worship that they have in the Assembly,” she explained. “But, [speaking in tongues] will never get you in Heaven.” She tapped her heart and added, “It’s what’s here, and your belief and the love of God that’s going to get you there.”



People in Chicamacomico attended each other's churches, however, no matter what the denomination, as church events such as revivals presented an opportunity for villagers to socialize. An Assembly member recalled walking to the Fair Haven Methodist church between Waves and Rodanthe to attend revivals. "Gang of young people would get together and walk up there." Today, in 2004, churches from the northern region of the island to Avon share an event called "the Singspiration," in which members from the various Methodist and Assembly churches gather to sing praise to God and socialize with one another, thus crosscutting both denominational and community boundaries.

### **7.3.5. Stores**

Mr. Aaron Hooper had a store in Salvo during the 1920s and 30s. It was a gathering place for villagers on Sunday afternoon; adults would chat while children played in massive, gnarled oak trees. The store was "a little building maybe 15, 18 feet wide by 25 foot long and it stored some can goods and stuff...no refrigeration." The small stores acted as *storehouses*. Rather than staying open for people to come and go, people would notify the storekeeper when they needed something. When families purchased staples in large sacks, the sacks were washed, taken apart, cut, and sewn into dresses and underwear. "They would sew with foot-operated machines. It was a very self-sufficient type of existence."

Walter Hooper had a store before World War II, as did Lucy Hooper. "Aunt Lucy" Hooper personified the self-reliant nature of the Outer Banker. She helped build the Assembly of God church and became preacher of it. She built her own house and boat, as well as a small store in Salvo. A villager recalled seeing Mac Midgett's father, who ran a fish house in Rodanthe, bring baby Mac in Aunt Lucy's store, "lay him up on the scales and punch a hole in a

can of milk and give it to him to drink.” Aunt Lucy added a wing to the store called the “Sweet Shop,” serving homemade ice cream and candy.

Bankers recalled food rationing during World War II. “You got a half a stick of butter and sometimes a stick of butter according to how many was in your family. Family of five or six would get a whole stick. Mama would seal [the butter] in a jar, put a rope around it, and put it down into the well to keep it cool.” Villagers consumed much fish and fowl, including shorebirds that were prepared with pie bread. Collards with cornmeal dumplings were a regular fare as well.

### **7.3.6. Pastimes and Childhood Activities**

Some villagers remember a childhood with little to do, while others recognize the rare freedom they had growing up on a sandy bank. “We had something here as children that probably very few places in the world have,” said an islander. “We had total and absolute freedom because the island was more or less sealed off from the outside world.” He pointed out that they had “no roads, no electricity, none of the amenities.” Parents had peace of mind as “there were no strangers to be concerned with about your children.” This islander also recalled how, as a child, he roamed about the woods and water, and would “run for the marsh, chase animals and run under creeks. Our parents just never worried where we were and what we were doing.”

Leslie Hooper and Gaskill Austin claimed to be some of the first surfers to ride the waves off Hatteras Island, before surfing became a popular sport in the 1950s. The Salvo boys collected old planks –“dunnage”– that washed ashore, and used them as makeshift surfboards. Austin recalled:

One day, I got too far out on a wave and curled, and the board dipped in the sand, rode me up over it and I slid off. A piece of the board split off the size of my finger went up through my armpit and came out through the back of my shoulder. I got stabbed good. My uncle held me down and put his foot on my shoulder and arm and yanked the thing out, and I went back in the ocean in the salt water and soaked in the salt water. Then I came home and hid [the wound] for a week or two until it healed up.

During World War II, Salvo children sat on the roofs of houses to watch ships and submarines burn in flames. They would regularly patrol the beach, finding lumber, bananas, and other surprises.

A village woman stressed that she was raised in a strict household. “If I went to a little girl’s house to play, I was only allowed one hour. When that hour was up I knew to be home on time, and I had to leave...in time enough to be home when that clock struck that hour.” She recalled spending many hours helping her mother with household chores:

Mama got up real early in the mornings and boiled our clothes, washed them in an old pot. Rinse them real good and get them on the line, and then she would clean the house, and as I grew older I had to help sweep and scrub the floors and take clothes in, fold them up. I was very young when I learned to iron, and I stood on a little wooden box. We didn’t have no sink to the table to wash the dishes.

Youth would get together and make “pull candy.” “It is made with sugar and vinegar, and you boil it and then you have to take lard or grease on your hands so it won’t burn you, and pull it until it gets stiff and then you break it off in little taffy pieces.” Teenagers were allowed to have bonfires and clambakes on the beach, and dance parties at the old school house.

The Community Recreation building, fashioned out of a section of someone’s house, was a popular destination for Salvo children during the 1940s. The clubhouse was established by a couple of community members to give youth a place to embroider, play checkers, ball and jacks—“bob jacks”—and other games.

Villagers of Salvo, like those in other Cape Hatteras communities, refrained from

working on Sunday; Sunday meals were prepared Saturday, nets and boats were cleaned and set onshore, and the Lord's Day was reserved for church, visiting and relaxing.

### **7.3.7. Medical Care**

A resident recalled growing up with his grandmother, a midwife. He used to "travel around sometimes from house-to-house with her when children were born and stand by while she was helping with the birth. I had to sit down and shut up and stay there until she finished." One of the midwives in Salvo was Patty Hooper.

In the 1930s and 40s, old-timers recall only one doctor serving the whole island, so islanders depended largely on home remedies:

Dr. Kenfield was his name. That was the only doctor on the whole beach. You just didn't go to doctors them days for every little cold. Your people doctored you up, old home remedies. If you had the flu they used to give you a dose of castor oil. That would grind your stomach like a grindstone, then they would give you a dose of Epsom salts to clean that out of you.

For emergencies, such as when the Assembly of God preacher was burned in a stove fire while cooking, an air-ambulance landed in the Waves cow pen and flew the patient to Norfolk. A villager recounted the tragic story of her deaf and mute sister who drowned in the sound on Mother's Day at age five. The girl had been born with disabilities, but was struck with an illness. "There weren't doctors here and mom had to take her to Elizabeth City, and the doctors then weren't up to date to what they would be today, and they claimed her tonsils had poisoned her." She shared another tragic event that illustrates the role of family and church in helping with not only physical ailments but mental or emotional crises as well. Her daughter was hit by a car and killed at age five.

I just went haywire and I never come out of it 'til the day they buried her. I was halfway wacky, I couldn't even get my own clothes on; my mom had to come in and help bathe

me. But, you know, down through life I feel like a lot of times that God lets us go down in the valley, and sometimes real deep, but I feel like He's always there to pull us back up on the mountain.

### **7.3.8. Early Transportation**

In 1950, “the highway was just to the north end of Rodanthe and the rest of it was sand trails. They were still running the wooden ferry” with a four car capacity. Les Hooper recalled hauling tar for the final stretch of road from Rodanthe to Oregon Inlet. He was working with Toby Tillet on “one of those old wooden ferries” and carried a “big old tank” full of tar. “They would pump it in trucks on this side.” The work crew “just put the tar down on the sand and ground it up with a machine. In hot weather if you stopped your car on it you would just sink right down and get stuck.”

### **7.3.9. Postal Service**

Clarks received its first post office in 1901 under postmaster Kenneth R. Pugh; for unknown reasons, Pugh requested the name “Phlox” for the village, but this was rejected in favor of “Salvo” (Crumbley and Ertzberger 1988). Pugh worked out of a tiny building located near the landing where the mail boat unloaded its letters and parcels. The building was moved up on the road toward the south end of the village when Melvina Whedbee became postmaster. Edward Hooper, the “oldest original person born in Salvo”—and still alive as of 2004— worked at the Salvo post office for almost 50 years, the latter years as postmaster. The post office became decommissioned after catching on fire in 1992 and the eight-by-twelve foot building was moved to Hooper's front yard (Figure 7.3.4).



Figure 7.3.4. William and Edward Hooper, Old Salvo Post Office.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

“People still come by wanting to mail a letter,” reported Edward Hooper. “Some of them sticks letters under the door.” In 1988 the Salvo post office tied for first place in the “Smallest Post Office Challenge,” a contest sponsored by the Oakland Division Communications Department of California. The interior of the post office was such that customers could only see the postal worker’s midriff through a slat. “I’d talk to them and they’d say, ‘yes ma’am, yes ma’am,’” laughed Edward Hooper. “And, when I got done I’d come around to the door - some

of them had the funniest look on their face! They didn't know [that I was a man]." He recounted a tale where one woman teased him about the small size of the building:

A woman come up to that little hole and she looks and says "Is this a bathroom?" "No ma'am, lady. This is the post office." She did the same thing again. She says, "Is this really a bathroom?" I say, "No ma'am lady this is the post office." Well the third time she rub me the wrong way. She was just making fun. I said, "Lady, you see all these bushes out round the back of this post office? If you need to go to the bathroom, you help yourself. That's where I go!" She didn't have to use the bathroom anymore.

### **7.3.10. Commercial Fishing**

Commercial fishing was very much a family activity; not only did women participate in net hanging and so on, but children often accompanied their father, uncle, or grandfather on fishing trips. These outings were not necessarily enjoyable for youngsters. A man recalled fishing with his grandfather at the age of ten: "We would go to the sound at night and fish until two o'clock in the morning with the other boats, come home and sleep a couple of hours and go to school. If you didn't work, you didn't eat." He expressed frustration at a few relatives who would wait on shore to say, "Oh boy, there's some pretty fish you got there, I sure would like a mess of them," yet neglect to go fishing themselves.

He went night fishing for mullet in the sound. Fishing grounds generally extended south to Gull Shoal Island half way to Avon, and then north to the inlet. Once mullet was spotted, two boats would encircle the school and "close in on them." The fish would jump "over the net like sheep, but you had to get overboard then and catch them individually, the big mullets. Wrap them up in a net and throw them in the boat because they didn't get gilled."

A villager described hand lining for red drum:

You would have a run in April when the fish went north and the October run when they came back south, that was the big one. We would get on the beach and we didn't have

fishing rods. We used hand lines. It was the precursor of the spinning reel. You used a big coil of line on your hand and you threw it in the ocean and let it run off your hand.

The women would cook and can the inch and half cubes of drum, preserving a supply for the winter months. “We would call it “pick fish.” They’d take it out and finish boiling it, put it on a plate and you’d break it up. Mix onions, meat cracklings and sprinkle those on it. It was quite a tasty dish.”

During shad season smoked shad would be hung in people’s yards. “It was like butterfly wings – you hang those over the clothesline and let them air dry.” Herring was salted and layered in barrels as well. The occasional sea turtle made its way to village kitchens, where people cleaned and stewed the meat or had “pick-up turtle,” meaning that everyone would gather around to pick the meat off the bones and eat it.

Old-timers recall when oysters were abundant in Pamlico Sound directly off Chicamacomico, but now fishermen have to travel far to find healthy oyster beds. “I could go down the shore and get a bushel of oysters anytime I wanted. Now, you can’t find a shell where they used to be.”

Net mesh was known as “marsh,” and children were expected to assist the men and women in tying nets. “That was something that everyone did, children and adults. You learned to tie nets when you were very small. Any free time that’s what you did, sit on the porches - there would be a half dozen people tying net while we were talking” (Figure 7.3.5).





Figure 7.3.5. Hand Carved Net Hook and Gauge.  
Photo by Jennifer Miller.

The Banker “Jack of all trade” tradition where men fished opportunistically has become difficult in the modern world of licenses, restrictions, and shrinking freedoms. “I worked for the state, although I had nets and stuff I used to set,” said a villager who lacked a commercial fishing license and, therefore, could not sell his catch. “I never thought that there would be the day when I couldn’t set a net and get me a mess of fish. What would it hurt?” He calculated that “there’s not a half a dozen fishermen in these three neighborhoods now.”

Luther Gray built a fish house in the sound at the Mail Boat lead, but it was destroyed in the 1933 storm. Shortly afterwards the Civilian Conservation Corps came in and dug several canals on the sound side, enabling Garland Hooper to build a fish house in Salvo. Today, in 2004, there are no fish houses in the northern banks region.

### **7.3.11. Hunting**

Men hunted duck and goose in Pamlico Sound as well as along the ocean beaches. According to a resident, islanders went to the beaches during nesting season to follow sea turtles

to their nesting spot to collect eggs until just after World War II. A villager explained that his favorite sport was duck hunting, but he had not participated in this activity for 15 years:

It's become too expensive. It's a rich man's sport, really. And, there's so many restrictions. You can't go here and you can't go there, and you can't do this and you can't do that.

A former hunting guide described the Gull Island hunting club located south of Salvo. The club was comprised of six men, from Knoxville, TN, Norfolk, VA, and Atlanta, GA who owned a clubhouse on Gull Island in the sound. They hunted "geese, diving ducks, and puddle ducks" and used sink boxes and blinds. A woman in Salvo dressed the fowl, and the ducks were shipped to Knoxville for the Kern's Bakery annual company party. The guide's homeplace was fashioned from the remains of the clubhouse destroyed in the 1944 storm. A smaller hunt club run by Guthrie Midgett was located at Clarks Bay just south of Salvo; it too was destroyed by storm.

### **7.3.12. Livestock and Gardening**

Salvo men undertook twice-annual cattle roundups. "When I was young, there was cattle and horses just roaming around everywhere, like the old west," recalled an old-timer. "The old guys used to round the cattle up all the way from Avon. They would bring them to the pound to mark the cows and brand the colts." The brands or ear-notch patterns were registered in Manteo to prove ownership. From 1921 to 1926 the cattle had to be driven every few weeks to the village-dipping vat, located near what is now the Salvo Campground. Herds of free ranging cattle were gone by the late 1930s, as was the practice of "killing a beef."

### 7.3.13. Perceptions of Environment and Storms

Outer Bankers are known for their attentiveness to climate, weather patterns, changes in wind, tide, water temperature, and fish behavior. Before radar and modern weather tracking, and even before the earlier weather stations of Hatteras and Ocracoke, villagers depended on their own observations to judge what the weather was going to do. A man recalled his grandfather, a fisherman, standing outside for a half hour each evening to study the weather to decide if and where he'd fish the following day. "It was a daily routine for him and he was very good at it. He would study the skies, wind direction, and everything else. He could pretty much predict the weather just as well as the weather stations do nowadays."

Villagers point out that, despite their long history of violent and devastating storms, there is no record of anyone dying in a hurricane. They are proud of their ancestors' abilities to ride out storms, and the fact that they inherited these survival skills. Many shake their heads at the "fuss" that is made in modern times, with mass evacuations, the boarding of windows, and post-storm visits by helicopters, FEMA teams, insurance adjusters, and reporters. They concede, however, that life is more complicated today and much of the fuss is necessary. Today islanders have carpeted homes, whereas historically houses had wooden floors that made it easier to sweep post-storm sand and mud out. Fewer people had cars and other possessions to worry about. "You didn't have electricity, worrying about your food is going to spoil. The electric is off, when are you going to get it back, and when can we get out on the roads?"

Bankers are acutely attuned to their natural surroundings, particularly those who spent time on the water. A hunting guide explained that he could tell where he is in Pamlico Sound on foggy days by the depth of the water and feel of the bottom:

Just take a paddle and tell because this is grass, long, grassy bottom. This is muddy bottom. This is sandy bottom when you leave the harbor here, you got grassy bottom out

through here. But just as soon as you get down here to No Ache Shoal you run on white sandy bottom, and if you're going' to Gull Shoal, and you run into this, this is Cedar Hammock Channel. It's muddy, and when you run to Gull Shoal Channel, it's deeper. And it's also muddy too, but it's deeper than Cedar Hammock Channel.

He knew the chances of catching fish in various places by which way the wind was blowing:

If the wind is off to the east'ard, this is a good place to fish. If the wind's off to the north'ard, down inside the reef is the best place to fish. And if the wind's off the west'ard, then you fish on this side of the channel, over next to Bay Shoal. You always fish on the lee side of the channel. That's where the fish congregates at.

#### **7.3.14. Significant Places**

A villager cited the Oregon Inlet Coast Guard station as an important place to him, one that he has unsuccessfully tried to get preserved.

That is very special because that was the point [before crossing Oregon Inlet to Manteo]. It was past the arduous part of the journey. Most of the crew was family and friends. Whoever was on duty in the lookout tower would wave you in and we'd stop and have a meal with them, so I'm very familiar with the station and spent a whole lot of time there.

The Salvo Day Use Area on the south end of the village is important to many people as well. "That was the most popular campground anywhere on the island," said a villager. "Was full to over-flowing most of the time, especially on weekends. They had a public beach over there and lifeguards." He explained that the National Park Service was losing money so they shut down the campground and turned it into a day area. On the site is an old cemetery, and in sound water next to the graveyard early baptisms and revivals took place (Figure 7.3.6). "I can remember this heavy woman with a dress being dipped in and she came up with her dress all clinging to her and I didn't think that looked too good. But I was a little child then. Within the last couple of years, two little children in our church have opted to be baptized in the ocean, and another in the sound."



Figure 7.3.6. Salvo Day Use Area Grave.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

As is common throughout Hatteras and Ocracoke, villagers are extremely attached to the burial sites of their loved ones and ancestors. A Salvo resident recently died of cancer. His wife had him buried in their backyard, establishing a new family burial plot. Six months later she had her daughter's grave moved from its highway-side location to the new backyard plot.

The tiny creeks along the sound are significant to fishermen, including an area where a new development was going up. "I spent a lot of happy hours up there in them creeks, hunting and fishing," said a Salvo man. He sailed about in a 16-foot skiff, catching fish and crabs. His

favorite area was called Jenkins Island and No Ache Island, because “that’s where I lived. Everyday I went down there fishing or hunting.” He knew the names of the creeks, and lamented that the younger generation would not bother to learn the old names like Brick Creek, Opening Creek, Horse Wading Creek, Crooked Creek, and Ben Peters Creek. “I’m the last generation that’s going to know [the names of creeks]. The generation that is growing up now, they don’t hunt, they don’t fish. They could care less what the name of a creek is.”

“From straight Highway 12, it doesn’t appear that there would be so many creeks off Salvo,” a fisherman pointed out. He could not recall the stories behind some of the names, but did recall a few. One landing was called Percy’s net rack. “He was a man that lived to Avon. He cut everybody’s hair years ago for a dollar a head. But he used to fish up around Gull Shoal and he had a net rack that he put there, and that’s why they called it Percy’s but a lot of people called it the snake pit, ‘cause there was a lot of snakes in the summertime.” He pointed out Kannigy’s Pond, drained so that “they could get the turtles out of it,” and a point called “A Man’s Grave” where somebody was buried. Another interesting name was “Hen Turd’s Creek” and “Cross Shoal,” where Coast Guardsmen used to meet and “clock in” with one another on patrol:

The Coast Guard used to have a little house here on the beach that was called the Cross House. That’s where they met from Avon and Gull Shoal, to check their clocks, and the guy from Gull Shoal had a key for the clock that was in Little Kinnakeet, and the guy from Little Kinnakeet had a key for the clock for Gull Shoal. Gull Shoal men had the key to Rodanthe clock, and Rodanthe had the key to Gull Shoal clock, and that’s how they would strike them, and that’s how they knew that they met.

He attributed his knowledge of the old creek names from “growing up in the sailing days” and a childhood of exploration. “They were all sailboats. Later on as I got up to 15 or 16, they started getting little Briggs and Stratton engines in their boats. When I got in my 20s they started buying outboards.”

“No Ache Point” and “No Ache Island” is rumored to be a humorous rejoinder to “Pains Creek” and “Pains Bay” across the sound on the mainland, although early maps list No Ache Point as “No Egg Point.” “No Egg Point was important as a descriptive place name because egg gathering from wild bird nests was an important activity supplementing the diet of early Bankers” (Payne 1985, 134) (see Maps 8.9.2 through 4 in Chapter 8).

Pre-1920s skiffs were about 18 feet long and four and a half foot wide, with home-sewn canvas sails and a jib. “They’d build them theirself. They’d just set up a place and buy the juniper and build them a boat.” Villagers sailed the skiffs “to Avon to a fellowship meeting,” on fishing trips, visits, and up and down the sound shore with its myriad of creeks, points, and islands.

### **7.3.15. Rituals and Community Events**

Villagers in Salvo participated in Rodanthe’s Old Christmas, belying the sentiment that Salvo was relatively independent from the other Chicamacomico communities. According to a Salvo resident, Old Christmas was a bigger celebration than Christmas, and during his childhood it was much more of a religious celebration than today’s event. “It was what people here believed was the true birth of Christ.” Children received “a little paper bag with an orange, apple, and a couple of walnuts. That was a big present.”

A resident remembered the old black face minstrels that were once part of the celebration. “Everyone would black up their face and have a play and act like they were colored people.” The plays were light-hearted and comical. “When I was growing up around Christmas time you would dress up in old clothes and hats and maybe black your face, or put a stocking over it and go around to everybody’s house and they would give you pie and cake and all kinds

of things.” A woman described why she quit attending the event in recent years despite her love for oysters. “If it’s a sin for me to take part with their drinking, it’s a sin to me to come up here to eat oysters.”

A villager played guitar at Old Christmas celebrations, as well as square dances that took place at the school throughout the year. “We used to have chicken stews and parties.” He played with C.Z. Runk, a Rodanthe schoolteacher and fiddler. They played traditional tunes such as “Red River Valley” and “Coming Around the Mountain.” People no longer gather like they used to, he lamented.

Funerals, like weddings, were simple and practical. “We had them, but it was a very simple ceremony, and then we put them in the ground.” Before embalming, such quick funerals were necessary, and people typically “sat up with the dead” the night before a burial.

### **7.3.16. National Park Service**

Some Salvo residents share other islanders’ belief that sand dunes cause, not prevent, erosion, and blame the National Park Service for taking part in dune-building. “You get that surge because of northeast winds pushing water through the inlets into the Sound.” After the eye of the storm passes, “you get a sudden shift of wind and all that water tries to come back at once. It’s taken days to get there.” The dunes “block the water from going back into the ocean and we get floods. The dunes protect the houses of the people who don’t have any more brains than to build right on the ocean.”

A villager touched on the hard feelings islanders had for the National Park Service land acquisition. “A lot of people were upset. They didn’t want to get tangled up with the government.” His grandfather “had 44 acres down south of Salvo, south of the campground,



from the campground down to them pine trees down there. I think they gave him about \$750.00 for it.” Yet, he conceded that, despite his anger that the National Park Service removed the old dipping vat from the Salvo campground, the establishment of the National Seashore was “maybe a good thing” because “we are not smothered to death with all that riff-raff and houses and whatever they build on the beaches.” The many dipping vats still scattered along Hatteras Island hold sentimental value to islanders recalling old roundups of horses and cattle; for the National Park Service to dig them up is akin to prying out yet another artifact of Banker culture, although some worry that the vats - long ago filled with poison - are linked to a seemingly high rate of cancer on the island and are glad to see them go.

### **7.3.17. Coast Guard and the Military**

Residents of Salvo had a network of fathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins in the Coast Guard (Figure 7.3.7). Many also worked for the ferry division, fished commercially, or were hunting and fishing guides. Five miles south of Salvo was the Gull Shoal Coast Guard Station, originally called Cedar Hummock when put in commission in 1878. Wrecks and rescues were common all along Chicamacomico and near Salvo in particular, such as the barkentine *Priscilla* that foundered in 1899. Gull Shoal Surfman Rasmus Midgett famously rescued ten people from that wreck without assistance. The *G.A. Kohler*, a four-masted schooner, also wrecked near Gull Shoal in the 1933 storm; both the Gull Shoal and Chicamacomico crews were called to rescue the eight-man crew. The *Kohler* was sold to Avon businessman Charles Williams for \$150 including all but the sails. Williams then sold it for the same price to Leonard Hooper of Salvo, and the timbers were used to build the Salvo Assembly of God church.



Figure 7.3.7. Surfman's Grave, Salvo Day Use Area.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Chicamacomico residents were in close proximity of Pea Island Coast Guard station, manned by an all black crew. A village woman remembered encountering this crew in the mid-1930s:

I had never seen a black man. I was scared so bad that when I seen these three men coming up the road, on a horse - one was in each track. Oh, my Lord! I thought the dickens was after me! I ran behind my great-grandmother's house to tell her what I'd seen, and she and my grandfather laughed just as hard as they could."

The Civilian Conservation Corps was active in Salvo in the 1930s, building a road near the Assembly of God church that forked off Highway 12 and led to the ocean.

### **7.3.18. Political Life**

Practical-minded islanders become involved in politics when there is a specific need or concern. A villager ran for Dare County commission because of his dissatisfaction with the island's water and desire for a water plant. "The water here was horrible. All we had was ground water, well water, surface water. In the old days, we collected rainwater to drink. But the ground water was like tea - brown and stunk terrible." A Republican, he was elected in the early 1980s and the commission had a Republican majority for the first time in 120 years. He laughed that the local paper's headline read, "The Walls of the Courthouse Trembled." A reverse osmosis desalination plant was then built in Rodanthe. "We've now got some of the best water in the country," he declared. He was also instrumental in getting a modern jail built in Manteo with a 911 communications system.

### **7.3.19. Modernity and Perceptions of Change**

Villagers generally agree that life before WWII was simpler and free of class differences. "We were dirt poor," observed a fellow, "but, I didn't know that until later years because everyone was the same." He added that "nobody ever went hungry because whatever one had, it was shared." He described his family driving to Manteo to buy flour and sugar in 100 pound bags, to be shared by "family, everyone in the village just about." This is in contrast to today, where islanders experience great class differences; although many live modest, middle-class lives, they dwell amid an aggressive and unprecedented level of affluence.

The rate of change accelerated greatly after World War II with electricity coming in 1948, the paved highway in 1953, and the bridge in 1963. A villager said that the road connecting Hatteras Island to the mainland changed the area "from paradise to nothing." He felt

like the road was a gateway to population growth and a loss of freedom. “Prior to the road, I could hunt and fish or do anything I wanted to, everyday. After that there were too many restrictions, and laws and stuff come. Here come all the people, they found us.”

A Salvo resident believed that the village was transforming not only because of new people moving in, but because native people were dying off or moving off-island. “They have different jobs and stuff. There’s not much to do here. There are so many laws now on fishing and stuff like that why, people got disgusted and left.” Young people in particular “finish high school and go away to college, then they move away.”

Although tourists and sport fishermen have long visited Hatteras and Ocracoke, and islanders worked as hunting and fishing guides, the methods and philosophy behind recreational fishing are hard for some to comprehend: “I don’t fish with a pole like this so called “sport fishing”. We fished for a purpose with utensils - to me it’s a waste of time to wait for a fish to come along and get on the end of a line.” Islanders also have difficulty comprehending the negative view some sportsmen and sports publications have toward nets and commercial fishing.

Another change noted by villagers pertained to crime and drug abuse. In the 1980s the drug of choice was marijuana but, during the last decade, the substances have become much more dangerous. A member of the Ladies Auxiliary said that the drug and alcohol problem in the villages is making it hard for the fire departments to find “new blood” and young recruits. “If Heaven is like Salvo, I don’t want to go,” she stated in reference to the state of the village today.

Some villagers noted that more islanders seem to be suffering from cancer than in the past. A resident wondered if processed, chemical-laden foods played a role. “When I was growing up, there could have been cancers, but, I do believe the food that we eat today is against

you.”

Sheer numbers of people and the accompanying development are transforming the communities of Hatteras Island. A villager discussed the “Wind over Waves” development going up north of Salvo where livestock was once penned:

That should have been made into a natural park for Rodanthe, Waves, and Salvo instead of being destroyed – there’s deer, otter, mink, muskrat, squirrel, and all kinds of animals over there. They’re destroying, they’re tearing the trees down, they’re pulling them up by the roots with a bulldozer.

Yet, many conceded that the job situation has improved greatly. “I think it’s been more for the better than the worse. More people have jobs. You can always pick up a job around here.” People in the past were poor of possessions but not of other things. “There’s a lot of things they didn’t have, but they had their churches and they had God and I think they were rich. ‘Cause they were very spiritual people.” Despite new people pouring in to the village every day, “the original people that lived in this neighborhood are very close...If one gets sick, the whole neighborhood feels it.”

## 7.4. Avon

### 7.4.1. Name, Place, and Features

Avon village (Figure 7.4.1), only three feet above sea level, was known as Kinnakeet long after the post office adopted the new name in 1883. Kinnakeet, an Algonkian word meaning “that which is mixed” (Williams 1975), was one of the earliest settlements on Hatteras Islands, and originally referred to an area extending from Buxton Woods to Salvo. It included the village of Kinnakeet proper, and two extinct settlements a couple of miles north: Scarboroughtown (“Scabbertown”) and Little Kinnakeet, the latter which was abandoned upon the closing of Little Kinnakeet Coast Guard station; some residents apparently relocated to Roanoke Island while others moved to Kinnakeet proper or other Hatteras villages (Payne 1985). The name “Avon” may be from the Avon River in England, but no one knows why it was selected (ibid). In the 1700s, Kinnakeet was home to the families Scarborough, Price, William, Miller, Farrow, Meekins, and Hooper; later the Gray family name became prominent.

Kinnakeet was known for its stands of live oak and cedar trees, a resource that enabled boat building to flourish in the village. During the Colonial period, dugouts and kunnerns—large canoes fashioned from three juniper logs—were manufactured. By 1820, timbers were cut for use in clipper ships, and small oyster schooners and sloops were built. Kinnakeet was one of the most thriving villages on Hatteras before Hatteras Inlet was opened in 1846, whereupon Hatteras village soon became the economic center. After the Civil War, shallow draft shad boats and sharpies were built in Avon. Boat building petered out, however, as trees were over harvested and became scarce. Sand hills thrived in areas denuded of trees, and an increase in sand dune movement further damaged remaining vegetation. The “sand wave of Hatteras” was a giant

dune that traveled from the ocean to the sound at Kinnakeet; by 1890 it had covered forests and unearthed graves, moving about 20 feet per month (Stick 1958, 286).

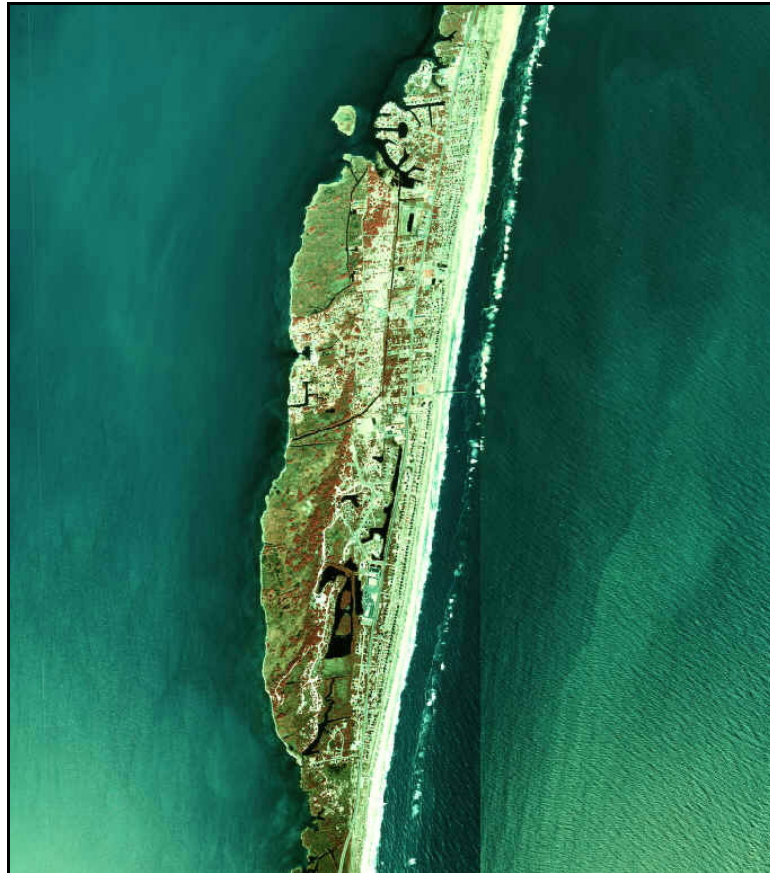


Figure 7.4.1. Satellite Image of Avon.  
Source: NC Division of Marine Fisheries.

Today the term *Kinnakeet* is still used, and *Kinnakeeters* refers to native villagers in the village proper, as opposed to the greater Avon area of shopping centers, a Cineplex, subdivisions, and rental beach homes. With the exception of Ocracoke, no village is more distant from the other villages than Avon; it is seven miles north of Buxton and 20 miles south of Salvo. No village is as surrounded by developments, either.

The village proper is not visible from Highway 12. Avon has the only two traffic lights on Hatteras, and one marks the road into old Kinnakeet. Kinnakeet has a circular layout, with in

intriguing mix of shady side roads and loops. Many of the houses are historical, with concrete cisterns still in place but unused. Some houses in Kinnakeet are new, and there is an assortment of mobile homes and pre-fabricated houses. A land berm or “diken” was built around the village after the 1933 storm to keep the ocean at bay but, when Hurricane Gloria flooded the village in 1985, people blamed the dike for preventing the sound waters from escaping. Others felt that the dike was necessary:

The ocean tide used to affect us bad sometimes. Go into the house, wash the chicken coop down. They dug a canal all the way around Avon as a drain and put the levy up. I think it helped quite a bit. But now they’re tearing it down. And one day they’re going to pay for it. It’ll come back to haunt them.

After the 1944 storm, dredge boats pumped sand from the sound side of Avon in order to build up the ocean side beach. This dredging created a cut extending from the former site of Little Kinnakeet Coast Guard station to Buxton, and included the “haulover” or “Canadian Hole” site just south of the village where wooden vessels were once hauled across from sound to ocean. This site is now a popular windsurfing spot.

Manson Meekins and his sister Mary Gray (now deceased) described the Avon home in which they were raised in the 1920s: it was a “T” shaped house with a kitchen annex and dining room built on the east side (Figure 7.4.2). It had two-stories, five bedrooms, a front and back porch, and a sitting room or parlor. Like most of the old Outer Banks homes, it was a continuous “work in progress” with a variety of modifications and additions over time – this attests to the adaptability and thriftiness of the islanders. The family cooked with a wood stove and heated with another located in the dining room where, according to Meekins, “people would gather in the evening or just before going to bed.”

There was no heat upstairs. When the kids were ready to go to bed, they’d just get warmed up and, in real cold weather, you’d run and jump in the feather bed. We had feather beds made from goose, brant, and duck feathers. And after you shivered about



three or four minutes, you'd settle down to a good night's sleep. But it was cold, particularly if you had to get up and go to the bathroom.



Figure 7.4.2. Meekins Homeplace, Avon. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Villagers later switched to coal or oil, and Manson Meekins remembers when the county would “bring a pile of coal in the fall of the year and pile it up at the corner of the school yard. I think people from the village in those days went in and helped themselves.” A resident recalled when his mother got her first oil stove. “My mother told daddy, ‘If you want me to cook again next year you better buy me an oil stove, because I’m not going to have this wood stove.’ Can you imagine in July cooking fried spots (a type of local fish) out there in that little kitchen? So, he bought her a Aladdin oil stove. It was beautiful - it was off-white and green.” A Hatteras storekeeper named Shank Austin acquired several oil burners that could be attached to the

Aladdin stove. The burners “had a little glass jar” for oil; the first family in Avon to equip their stove with this new apparatus found that “everybody come in here looking at that [oil] stove.”

In the “T” shaped Meekins house, the family had mahogany furniture from the *G.A. Kohler* that wrecked in the '33 storm. The house was surrounded by what Mary Gray called a “paling” fence to keep out cattle, horses, hogs, and sheep. Houses typically had several outbuildings, including a smokehouse. “Everyone had wire fences or picket fences or plank fencing. It wasn't to mark the property lines, but to keep the animals out of your yard.” The Meekins had an outhouse until 1947 when electricity came to the village and made water pumps and inside plumbing possible. The homeplace still stands today, in 2004; children visiting from off-island stay there and a family member “cuts the grass and sort of keeps watch on the old thing.”

Today's Harbor Road did not exist before World War II, and the harbor area was a swamp. “The creek in the middle of the swamp ran from the Pamlico Sound right on up through the village, separating Dog Ridge (southern half) from Cat Ridge (northern side).” Kinnakeeters referred to “Cat Ridgers” and “Dog Ridgers,” and joked that the names came about because families living in those areas “fought like cats and dogs.” A cart path and four-inch wide footbridge connected Cat Ridge and Dog Ridge, before the mouth of the creek was dug out in 1947 to form the harbor and the surrounding marshy area was filled. The east edge of the village bordering the swamp was called the “Hills.” An area further south was called “Pot Head,” and a collection of houses on the northern border was referred to as the North'ard or “Spain” (Figure 7.4.3). About a mile south of the village beyond Pot Head was once a settlement called the South'ard (Map 7.4).

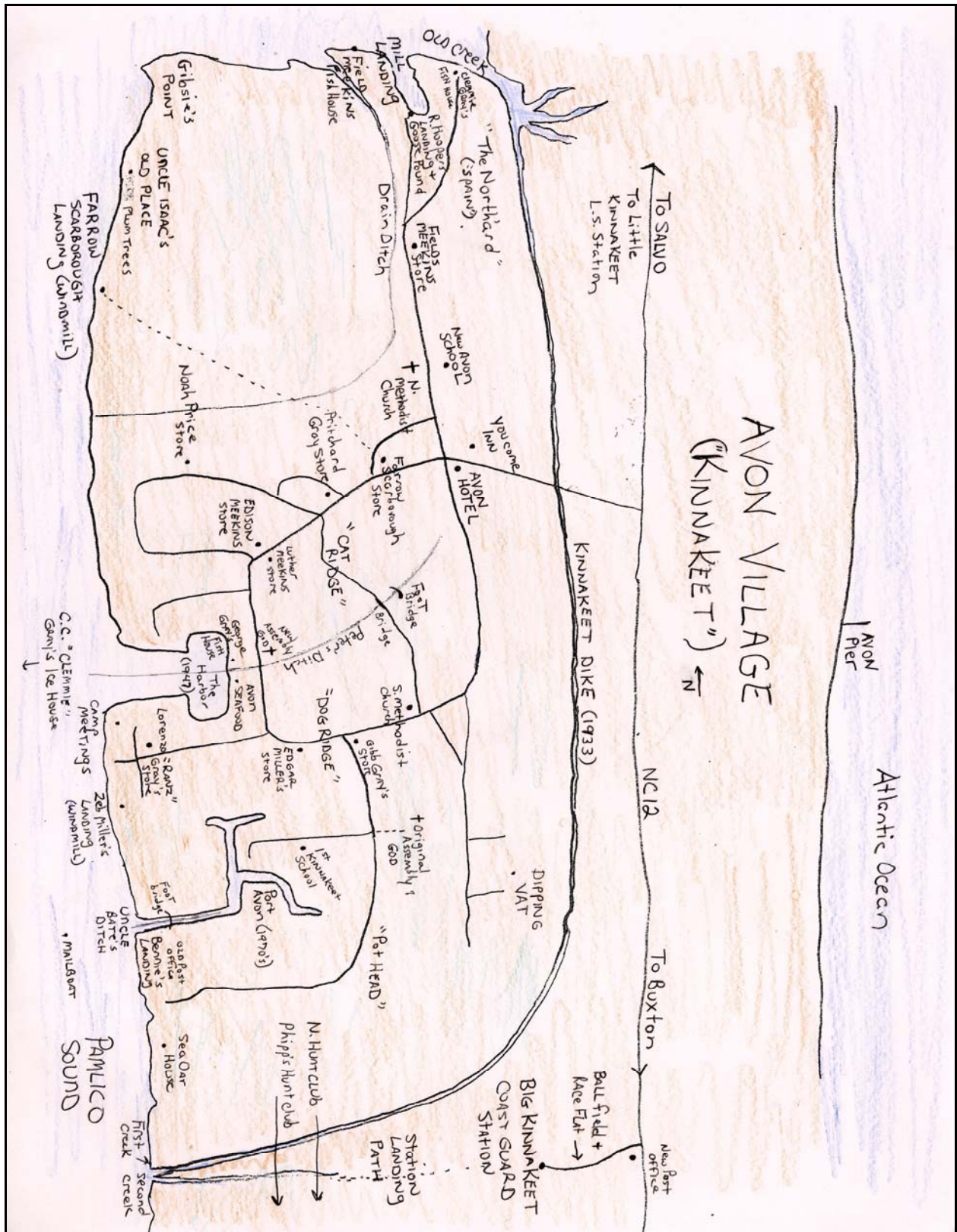
Several families lived down the South'ard. And in my time there was maybe four or five houses left down there. But it was quite a walk in those days for people to come up to

shop to the stores, and they eventually all moved away or moved up to the village here in Avon, and their houses just went to pot.

On the south end of Avon is a little cut known as “First Creek,” where a schooner washed up in the 1933 storm and the sailor simply lived on it aground for a few years. A villager recalled fishermen coming from Core Sound in Carteret County to camp in First Creek while fishing for speckled trout. “They used to live on little cabin boats back there.” Almost two miles south of the village proper on the Pamlico Sound side is a tidal stream known as Askins Creek, just south of Black Hammock Marsh (Payne 1985). Today in the southern part of the village proper are a couple of canals dug in the 1970s for an early development known as “Port Avon.”



Figure 7.4.3. The North'ard, circa 1940. Illustration by Manson Meekins.



Map 7.4. Avon Village with Historical Sites (not to scale). Sketch by B. Garrity-Blake.

Like all the villages, Avon had its share of mosquitoes, particularly before mosquito ditches were dug. “I’ve seen mosquito gluts here and it looked like smoke coming out of a smoke stack.”

#### **7.4.2. Relation to Other Villages and Beyond**

Avon villagers, in comparing their community with other Hatteras communities, stressed that their village was unique, independent, and geographically set-apart. Unlike the Rodanthe/Waves/Salvo or Hatteras/Frisco/Buxton trios, Avon stands alone midway down Hatteras Island, 12 miles south of Salvo and six miles north of Buxton. “Rodanthe was Midgetts. They all stuck together, they didn’t like people from Waves, it was just clannish,” a Kinnakeeter said. “Salvo was kind of a mild place. Then you had Avon, which was totally separate - Avon’s always kind of been on its own.” Villagers found it a challenge to keep their intertwined, multi-generational kin relations straight:

My mother’s grandfather was married five times. The last time he married he was 65, and he married a 16-year old girl and fathered two boys. You wouldn’t believe the kids he had. My mother never knew who her grandmother was. She said, “I don’t know which one of the children was my grandmother.”

An old-timer recalled a bitter winter, possibly of 1914, when the sound froze. She was a child living at Little Kinnakeet, the station north of Chicamacomico near Avon. Men from Rodanthe arrived on foot looking for food and supplies, as they could not launch their vessels. The residents of Little Kinnakeet helped them out, as people did in times of stress:

The people up to Rodanthe had eat their food up. Two men walked down from Rodanthe and took up on their back what food they could. The sound was froze up and they couldn’t get down here [by boat]. And the ground was frozen – they couldn’t drive horses on the frozen ground.

Avon was heavily employed in the Coast Guard, and, therefore, had well-traveled community members who had experienced numerous assignments around the country. Those in the military were exposed to the wider world. A villager lived in Tampa, New York, Honolulu, Detroit, and Norfolk, and during World War II was on a ship that toured Japan, the Philippines, and China. A resident reflected on the differences that she perceived between Hatteras Islanders and off-island communities. "I realized [in living off-island] that there was always something different about this place. We didn't have everything but the people were different here - they're more thoughtful of each other. Until progress, it was like one big family."

A new bride moved to Avon in 1932 at age 17 from New York. She had married an Avon man serving in the Coast Guard, and experienced quite a shock when she moved to his barrier island home:

No roads nowheres - sandy car ruts, and the cattle and horses was roving free. After we bought the old church and moved up here, the outhouse was back there in the marsh and there was no trees, it was all the saltwater grass. I went to the outhouse, and when I turned to come back there was this old brindle bull between me and the house, and I was stuck out there for about two hours. He was a gentle old thing, but I was from New York and I didn't know nothing about gentle bulls.

Her husband's family treated her like their own, however, and "everyone was nice and wonderful." She noted that all the women wore sunbonnets. It was disconcerting, however, when "the cattle would come and scrape their horns at night on the side of the house," as her house was near a watering hole. The area was called "Frog Marsh" and "good, fat, hoppy toads, hundreds of them in the evening, come up here in the yard." Her first experience fishing with her husband was memorable:

He was going to take us out in the boat in the middle of the day, on a little picnic. And I was from New York, and I never drove a boat. Well, he puts me at the wheel and says, "Starboard this way, that way." I didn't even know what "starboard" meant. I run her aground. That was the wrong thing to do. We stayed aground for I don't know how long, and his mouth was a-going continually.

Avon families sometimes made the trip to Norfolk to shop. A villager recalled going to the shoe store with her sister so regularly that the proprietor had a nickname for them:

We had this one place that we'd go to, and they had their shoes setting out in the showroom. We had to buy the ones that they'd show us. They were called samples because they just had the small ones in the samples. The others was too big for us. We had such small feet. They called us the Sample Girls.

### **7.4.3. School**

Nineteenth century children were educated in various people's homes by volunteer teachers. When the first state school was built in the village, "Dog Ridgers" and "Cat Ridgers" lobbied for the consolidated facility to be located in their respective part of the village (Williams 1975). Around the turn of the century, a school was built in the southern part of the village between Dog Ridge and Pot Head. By the 1920s the school taught through the ninth grade. One student attended eighth grade in Manteo, ninth grade in Buxton, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade at a school in Black Mountain. She finished high school in Hatteras Village. She remembered the school in Avon as "one room after another, maybe five rooms like an old motel." There was a potbelly stove that was stoked by the children first thing in the morning. "It was quite a while before things would get warm enough so you could really hear what the teacher was saying." One hundred yards away toward the beach were two privies, one for the boys and one for the girls. The students had "regular spellers" and readers in all the basic subjects.

Manson Meekins attended Avon school through most of the ninth grade, but "I didn't go any higher" because the 1933 storm "washed the schoolhouse down." The remainder of the school took place in private homes." He finished 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Hatteras, and graduated after the 11<sup>th</sup> grade in Elizabeth City in the early 1930s. While attending school in Elizabeth City, the '33 storm hit just before his father was due to send him money for books. The wind shifted out of



the northwest and blew the water out of the Pasquatank River; Meekins and his friend explored the muddy river bottom and made a find that provided the means for him to buy his own books; they discovered a huge pile of “ring dogs.”

[Ring dog] is a wedged shape tool about six or eight inches long with a ring in it. They were used to drive that wedge into log rafts and run chains through the rings to keep the rafts together to bring the logs to the mill. Someone found out that we had them, and he gave us six cents apiece.

After the old schoolhouse was destroyed by the 1933 storm, a new school was built in the Cat Ridge portion of the village toward the “North’ard” across from Pritchard Gray’s store. Kinnakeet students attended this school from 1935 until 1955, when the new Cape Hatteras School was built and all the village schools consolidated into one. Kinnakeet School was the last to shut down, as the other villages sent their children to the old Cape Hatteras School two years prior.

The National Park played an important role in ensuring regular education for village youth. For example, the Ocracoke School—among the first on the island—was instituted to educate the children of the surfmen working at the Life Saving Station. One villager, born in 1898, reported that Little Kinnakeet station, north of Avon, had its own school which she attended until age 15. Then she “come down here to Avon School, and I boarded to my aunt’s.”

#### **7.4.4. Church**

Church was long the center of the community in Avon, and some people noted that people had a “deeper faith in God than they have today.” “We grew up mostly in the church,” said an old-timer. Until the late 1920s, there were two churches in the village: the southern Methodists and the northern Methodists. Then came the Pentecostal faith: “My family were Methodist in the beginning but later after they were saved, they became Assembly of God,”

explained Mary Gray. The Methodist churches eventually united to form one congregation, the St. Johns United Methodist church. The old Methodist Church North, located on the north end of the village, was converted into a villager's home before it was torn down in 2004. The inhabitant explained the difference between the churches as "the Methodists is dead, dead, dead and the Assembly is up, up, up."

Some of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Avon preachers included Mr. Johnson, Mr. Fitz, Mr. Pilcher, Mr. Altree, Mr. Reagan, and Andrew Price. One of the preachers traveled up to Little Kinnakeet to preach on a designated Sunday. A 19<sup>th</sup> century Avon preacher named Anderson Gray was famous for his booming sermons at revivals, and legend has it that he had no need to travel to Little Kinnakeet, as his voice carried that far (MacNeill 1958). His famous sermon around 1847 railed against the evils of a new-fangled threat to civilization and honest hard work: steam.

The will of wind was the will of God, and the only allowable departure from natural and spiritual law – well, it was no sin for a man to take a stout oar in his hand for short distances. But the fires that men built under pots to make steam to blow them, even against the wind – well, such fires were akin to the fires of hell itself (MacNeill 1958, 128).

Avon was the birthplace of the Pentecostal faith on the Outer Banks. Methodist missionary Myrtle Chambers and her husband sailed to the village on the *Missouri* from Elizabeth City in 1926. They were invited to pitch a tent beside the Southern Methodist Church for spring revival, and began attracting villagers with an especially fervent style of preaching. Many villagers were "saved," including some surfmen from Little and Big Kinnakeet stations. The following year, June of 1927, Chambers returned and held a camp meeting so anticipated that both the northern and southern Methodist churches cancelled their services, and the preachers attended the "several week" long revival (Rasnake 1999, 40). As the third annual

revival approached, Methodist preachers and elders who had grown uncomfortable with the displays of emotion, announced the excommunication of Pentecostal believers for “emotionalism and fanaticism” (ibid, 50). This led to the establishment of an Assembly of God congregation and church. The religious split was one of the most significant changes that Kinnakeeters experienced in the 1920s and 30s. Villagers recalled divided families, deep disagreements, and hurt feelings among children whose family “got religion” and could no longer sing secular songs with their classmates.

An elderly resident remembered the old camp meetings. She said that people would cook biscuits and molasses bread to bring to the event. They made makeshift tents and spread quilts beneath them. There were large canvas tents with seats for the revival. The camp meetings, lasting for “three or four days,” would attract villagers from Chicamacomico, Hatteras village, and even Stumpy Point across the sound. The revivals would begin each morning with a six o’clock prayer meeting. “You weren’t allowed to eat breakfast until after that. My youngest sister was christened at that last camp meeting. She was six months old.” Another villager did not recall the meetings, but heard a lot about them.

Just this side of the harbor, there was a nice, sandy beach landing where they’d hold camp meetings. And the word would get around and people from Hatteras, Manteo, Wanchese, across the sound, would gather down there. They would sleep in tents. They’d be people selling drinks, maybe lemonade. The people in the village would help feed them.

Villagers built a large tabernacle to worship at the landing, using planking for pews and marsh reeds for a thatched roof; oil lanterns were hung all around (Williams 1975).

The “exhorters” or preachers came around and “people would be converted.” A villager supposed that the newly converted were not so much transformed in a religious sense, but were attracted to the fellowship and social activities; he joked that all the “congregating and

assembling” bordered on the “pornographic” as “young people will be young people. Hear all kind of tales.”

The Pentecostals and Methodists did not always see eye to eye, and shared a friendly rivalry as illustrated by an anecdote: “They said that the Assembly of God was singing, ‘Will there be any stars in my crown?’ This was on Sunday morning, and the Methodist Church was singing ‘No, not one.’ They always told that stuff.” Some suggest that the Assembly of God, when establishing themselves in Avon, benefited from rifts within the Methodist church and siphoned off members; once the Methodist churches united, some villagers objected to giving up their old church, and protested by attending the Assembly of God. The Assembly of God met each Sunday, whereas the Methodist church shared a preacher with Chicamacomico and held services only two Sundays a month, creating a space for people to attend the Pentecostal services.

There were four sisters from Avon, members of the Methodist church. Just before one died, she said that the Methodist Church had invited [the Pentecostals] there to do a revival. They came and brought their own musicians. They brought everything, set up beside the Methodist Church in Avon, and then split it. Her idea was that it was the worst thing that ever happened to her church. On the other hand there are many people who have always worshiped in both churches, back and forth.

Members of the Avon Worship Center, as the Assembly of God church was called, built a new church after the 1933 storm, using the turnbuckles of the *G.A. Kohler* to anchor each corner of the building with cables. The church consequently survived the 1944 storm, and was moved to the harbor a few years later.

#### **7.4.5. Stores**

The general stores of Avon were meeting places as well as places of commerce. According to a resident, the general store “is where we got all our information.” A woman

raised in Little Kinnakeet said that the Coast Guard settlement had no store. “We used to have to walk down here to Avon from Kinnakeet Station and take our groceries back up. If we could get a horse and cart, we could get into it.” They bought flour, cornmeal, sugar, coffee, lard, beans, peas, canned tomatoes, and canned beef. Villagers could not purchase fresh eggs, meat, or bread, but had to procure their own. “I was telling somebody a few days ago, down at Food Lion (a local grocery chain store), this old man, I said what do you think these old people would do, walk in Food Lion and see all this food. My God, they couldn’t believe it!”

Luther Meekins, George Meekins, and Edison Meekins were three of the earlier proprietors. Charlie Williams delivered meat by truck to Avon stores each Thursday, and before he began that route people remembered a man named “Porkchop” who provided the service from Currituck. One larger establishment before World War II was Gibb Gray’s General Store that operated from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s. Gibb Gray kept an iron safe, in which he held not only his own valuables but the savings of his neighbors. In the 1944 storm Gray took all the money and put it into a bag; to escape the rising waters he sat in a tree holding the sack and keeping everyone’s savings safe (MacNeill 1958). Pritchard Gray, Erskine Scarborough, Fields Meekins, Andrew Meekins, Noah Price, Farrow Scarborough, Edgar Miller, Lorenzo “Ranz” Gray, and George Oliver O’Neal also ran stores. Fields Meekins was blind, and had a guide rope running from his house to the store (Figure 7.4.4). Pritchard Gray’s father ran a wire to his store from a Delco generator, and the family would hold dances there with a jukebox. “And we’d go out there to that store and put yellow meal on the floor. And that made the prettiest yellow floor you’ve ever seen. Cleaned it right up.” Avon Shopping Center and Tackle, run by the Williams family, was one of the first stores located on the highway; it operated during the 1950s when the

paved road first ran to Hatteras and then to Rodanthe. Avon children traded eggs to storekeepers for penny candy.



Figure 7.4.4. Fields Meekins' Old Store. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Stores typically had a big barrel where patrons could fish out a pickle for a nickel.

They had these pickles into a big keg. And I keep dipping down in there, running my hand down in there. I'd have to go around all in there to find the biggest one. And I'd lay the others on the keg, and lot of them [children] would take one of them pickles, and put it up their bloomer leg. Get a free one, y'know?

Charles William's trucking business supplied the island with goods. A driver said, "If you could have seen the refrigerators we hauled after they put that electricity down here!" They took orders up and down the island at community stores and Coast Guard stations once a week. They picked up orders in Norfolk and delivered them to island stores, stations, and families.

Mainland salesmen, or "drummers," sailed or drove to the island and took orders. They comprised an important customer for the fledgling hotel business. In Avon, salesmen stayed at the only place available: the Avon Hotel located on the outer loop of the village proper (Figure 7.4.5). When the Avon Hotel was built in 1952 it was the second one on Hatteras Island; the first was the Atlantic View Hotel in Hatteras village, built in the 1920s. Boat builder Willie Austin built the Avon Hotel, and his wife ran it; later the couple's daughter and her husband took it over. She cooked, cleaned the rooms, and ran the desk. The daughter recalled charging salesmen and sport fishermen \$2.50 per night plus \$1.75 for a big breakfast. A Buxton woman worked as manager and cook at the twenty-room hotel. She said the hotel was relatively large compared to two smaller ones in Buxton, and sometimes had prominent visitors such as state senators.

We served breakfast, lunch, and dinner. At six o'clock [a.m.] I had those grills going. Lunch was skimpy, a couple or so parties off the street. Boarders would start coming in from fishing or the beach about five, and supper was from five to seven. Twenty-five or 30 dinners. Each week I had two deliveries. The owner's father bought food in Norfolk, and peddled it down here on the island to all the stores.

Winters were slow, but sometimes work crews, such as the road builders of the Dickerson Company, boarded at the Avon Hotel and provided business:

One winter I had Dickerson, Inc. men here for a couple of months, and they were working around the lighthouse putting new roads around it. I would get up and make 30 eggs scrambled. They would get big platters full of bacon and eggs or sausage and eggs. Lots of toast. We would just put it on the table and let them help themselves. They were charged a certain amount per day. That was a good winter, because of income coming in.



Figure 7.4.5. Old Avon Hotel next to Modern Water Tower. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

An Avon old-timer recalled that only a few people had radios when they first came available. “Clemmy Gray had one. An Atwater Kent – a big cabinet radio.” Because he drove a freight truck and had access to goods, someone offered to trade him his radio for two cans of paint.

If you give me a couple gallons of paint, I’d trade you that radio, [he said]. So, I went and got him a couple of gallons of cheap paint, a blue or purple. You had to have three A batteries [to operate the radio], and a D battery. There wasn’t any electricity. You could have her on and she’d be playing. If you walked across the floor, she’d change stations. I told him, and he said, “I’m glad of it, that’s what you get for giving me that grape paint.”



#### 7.4.6. Pastimes and Childhood Activities

Teens gathered at different friends' houses to cook chicken stew. "We cooked anything we could get our hands on and that would have been a party." A villager remembered her mother warning her not to invite any boys who stole chickens. "But, most of the time they would [steal chickens]." Her family had a piano in the home, and her friends would gather around to sing. Teenagers also liked to pilfer collards and cook them with dumplings.

Some man come here wanting to know if I was the one that ate them collards that was stole from this man. I wasn't going to admit it. "I don't know anything about it." He said, "We're trying to find out who they were, they were poisoned." Aah, they were going to see what we would do about it. Someone told us, "They're just trying to find out who got the collards."

A Coast Guardsman's son moved to Beaufort when his father got transferred to Fort Macon and attended high school there for six months. "I played in the first football game I ever saw. Didn't have football in Avon."

Swimming was the main activity for young boys. "No traffic on the beach, we'd just pull off our clothes and go naked," recalled a villager. "See a car coming from a long distance, we'd go in the ocean and let it pass. And we swam in the sound, lot of crabs, things that make swimming in the sound inconvenient and painful at times." The "sea tides," or occasional ocean overwash from the Atlantic to the Pamlico, offered entertainment for Avon children. "The water would come in mass over towards these creeks, and kids in the summertime would swim in the heads of these creeks as the water would pile down through. And you could swim at great speed with the current from the ocean coming down through these creeks."

Hatteras Village was the "place of excitement" for Avon teenagers in the 1930s and 40s because of dances and movies. "So the boys of Avon, if one of them could get their father's car, we would go down there of a Saturday night." They would stop in Frisco, where "somebody

would go to an old house down there, and pretty soon they'd come back with a pint of corn whiskey that cost a dollar."

So we'd take the whiskey and go out to Frisco woods and all get out. Somebody would light a cigarette for a chaser. They'd open the bottle and each guy would take a big slug of the stuff and pass quickly to the other guy, and he'd start beating his breast, trying to get his breath. By the time we got to Hatteras I'd be feeling pretty good but nobody really got drunk.

Although some of the fellows from different villages would fight each other, the highlight of the evening was the pavilion square dances where musicians such as fiddler James Austin, now deceased, would play. Manson Meekins, age 89, recalled:

Along the sides there'd be benches where people would sit. People were hobnobbing and laughing, enjoying themselves. But when the music started, people would of course gather around in the center. It wasn't all fighting. It was a good fellowship down there. But all that stuff is gone.

A night out in Avon meant leaving the village by 4:00 pm to drive to a 7:30 movie. If they returned right after the movie, they arrived back in Avon by midnight. The only beer hall in Avon was the "You Come In" near the Avon Hotel, operating during the World War II period.

Teenagers in the 1920s they held square dances at the old seaweed building or "sea oar house." Where Kinnakeeters got the term "sea oar" is unclear; one resident surmised that it was from the old English term "seawar" for seaweed. But, the storage house for seaweed bound for the market doubled as a social hall. One person "played harmonica, another the banjo, and a third the drum," while a caller directed the dance. Some Kinnakeeters were wary of these dances, such as a father who "came down there after his girl," unable to find her hiding behind huge bales of seaweed.

We'd blow the lights out, and every one of us would go get behind the bunches of sea oars that they had fixed up ready to be sent off. We was hiding all around. He said "Mary?" and I said [in a gruff voice], "This is not Mary." I didn't want him to know my voice. "She's not here."

A superintendent from the Methodist church did not approve of the sea oar house dances, and tried to “find out who was down there that Saturday night.”

I guess they were going to turn them out in church. So, he came here, my mother told him, she said “Well, I can tell you that my oldest daughter wasn’t into it. But I don’t know about my youngest one.” She said, “They’re young, and you’ve been young once, and I don’t think they should be turned out of the church, I think they should be put in church, and talked to about things.”

“People used to go down to the beach of an evening,” said a villager. *Evening* for old-timers is the afternoon. “But I didn’t do much bathing in the sea. I was afraid of that.” She enjoyed sitting quietly to crochet and embroider. “Didn’t have no TV or nothing - everyone mostly crocheted and embroidered pillowcases and covers and things, them days.” Her favorite pastime was cooking candy as a teenager:

Put sugar and cocoa together, and milk, and boil it until it got kind of hard and pour it out. And we used to boil sugar and make candy, and put some vinegar into it, pull it. It got so tough you could make twisties out of it and lay it in a pan. It’s good! That vinegar gives it a little sour taste. Girls and boys also got together of a night to fix that fudge.

A woman recalled cutting paper dolls out of store catalogues; she and her friends played a game called “eat sure ‘nuf”: “I’d come to my house and get salt, pepper, sugar, or something. Some of the others would go to their house and get something like tea, coffee,” she explained. “We’d call that ‘eat sure ‘nuf. We’d take something ready to eat to a playhouse. So we’d eat sure ‘nuf.”

Children often accompanied parents when they fished, traded, or visited. The son of a freight boat captain used to sail with his father at every opportunity. “To a kid, that’s very interesting, going to all these ports up river. My father made me watch him do everything.” Children helped adults make fishing nets from twine, including Lottie Williams of Avon who made nets “from the time she was a young girl. Even right before she died she still did it just to have something to do.” Quilting was another popular pastime.

#### 7.4.7. Medical Care

When one resident was seven years old, in 1905, she contracted the whooping cough. Her family bundled her up in a horse and cart and took her from the Little Kinnakeet station north of Avon to a Dr. Davis in Buxton. “They didn’t have shots in them days,” she reported, but she was given patent medicine. Stores sold laudanum, a popular drug for women. “Back in the old days they used to say these old women were floating around the road” on laudanum. Paregoric was also common. “My mother used to rub my gums in it when I was a kid. No wonder the kids was happy.” “Chill Tonic” was taken in “the fall of the year, and it was supposed to keep you from getting colds.” Asafetida was purchased as well. “All the kids around here had worms,” said a villager. “We didn’t have enough vegetables.” The children were given “worm drops.” “I’ve heard my mother say that old people would chew willow bark,” said a fisherman, explaining that aspirin is made from willow trees.

An elderly woman had a brother who died of the flu, and a sister who died of “some kind of disease that was going around.” She learned the recipe for cough medicine from a villager:

He told me, “Two spoonfuls of honey, two spoonfuls of bourbon and a spoonful of lemon juice.” I said, “Well what is bourbon?” He said “For God’s sakes, Ruby, don’t you know what bourbon is? It’s whiskey.” That was good, good, stuff, I’m telling you one thing.

Villagers began seeking her out for her homemade cough medicine.

Different ones would say they had a cough. I fixed so much of that cough medicine, and give it to one of their children to take to their mother if (she) had the cough, or give it to the mother to take to their children. The last lady, she died, not too long ago, she told me, “There’s one thing that I wouldn’t do without in my home, and that is that whiskey, honey, and lemon juice.”

The old people picked leaves off the mullein bush (*Verbascum thapsus*) and wrapped a sprained ankle with them. A man recalled breaking his leg when he was 12 years old; the Navy pharmacist placed a splint on it made from a shingle, and three days later his parents took him to

Elizabeth City for a cast. “He put a cloth on my face spread with ether to put me asleep to put that cast on.” The debilitated boy moved to a first floor bedroom when they returned to Avon, and that morning the house caught fire and he had to jump out the window headfirst. In the 1930’s it was not unusual to see “somebody with their arm in a sling from old Fords, [the starting crank] kicked back on people.”

#### **7.4.7.1. Omi Meekins, Midwife**

Mary Gray explained that her mother, Leona “Omi” Meekins, the wife of a Coast Guardsman, was compelled to become a “Jack of All Trades” due to the frequent absence of her husband. Her skills included administering medical care to villagers and teaching at the old Kinnakeet School in the 1910s and 1920s. “She was the community nurse. She was a teacher awhile. She pulled all the kids teeth and cut their hair. Everybody that had a problem would come to her.”

Kinnakeeters called on “Miss Omi,” who had some training in nursing from St. Vincent’s hospital in Norfolk, for “anything but operating.” Her remedies included “putting melted butter–British oil– in your ears.” She and others would make a poultice “out of the mullein leaf plant” for aches and sores. Toothaches were treated with hot pepper vinegar to dull the pain. She treated people for whooping cough, sore throats, measles, and other ailments.

Omi Meekins she was most known for her work as the village midwife, delivering “more than a 100 babies.” Mary Gray recalled her mother’s “big brown bag” full of midwife tools and birth records. “She had to send a copy of every birth to Raleigh and then she’d keep the stub - she’d have to fill out the mother’s name, the father, and whether it was a male or female.” She

charged \$10 or \$15 dollars for “several days of care.” Midwives typically “stayed until [the mother] got on her feet.”

A Kinnakeet woman had Omi Meekins deliver one her babies, and midwife Annie Meekins another in the 1930s. After giving birth at home, she hired a girl to stay with her and assist for two dollars a week. Her third child was delivered by Dr. Hornstein in Buxton.

I went down there for a checkup, and it was about a month before she was supposed to be born, and he said to me, “How would you like to have your baby born tonight?” I said, well, I ain’t sick, so he sent me back home. My husband took me back the next day and I had Cheryl. I think he must have forced labor. He wanted to go somewheres is what it was, that what we accused him of.

Her mistrust of the physician was in contrast to the faith villagers had for Omi Meekins. The midwife died one month short of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

A female physician named Dr. Stet moved to Hatteras Village and visited the villages via “a broken down automobile or a horse and cart.” After her “reign there was other doctors moved in,” a villager explained. “Things began to improve. But, until I was 16 years old [in 1932], medical care down this way was terrible.” Kinnakeeters remember Dr. Kenfield and Dr. Eppler in Hatteras. There was also a “hospital corpsman” stationed at the Navy base in Buxton who could be called for emergencies, but he was “an enlisted man with no formal training hardly.” The Navy would send a seaplane to transport patients in dire emergencies, such as a woman with a difficult labor. But just getting a patient from Avon to the plane was a trial. “Take the mother who was in labor in a horse and cart or a car, take her down there and put her in a skiff, take her out to the airplane, fly her to Norfolk or Elizabeth City. I know there’s people who died under those conditions.”

An outbreak of typhoid fever came to the island in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. One family in Avon experienced the deadly disease. “They had two children die of typhoid fever, and I

remember seeing those kids. They lost all their hair. Had no medical care. They just stayed in the old house up there and died.”

The village had no dentists, and villagers with serious dental problems would either go to an off-island site such as Elizabeth City, or wait for the traveling dentist. The traveling dentists had foot-pedal drills, and would come in on the mail boat. A man explained that he had to have two molars pulled when he left for boarding school in Elizabeth City because on the island his teeth “had been neglected.” Some villagers sought Omi Meekins to pull their teeth, or anyone else with the proper tools. A few people were sought out as dentists not because they had special skill in teeth pulling, but because they had pliers. “Mr. David O’Neal up at the north end of the village, he had a special pair of pliers and people would go to him to pull their teeth with no anesthetic.”

#### **7.4.8. Early Transportation**

The old sand roads were made from people walking or driving horses or horses and carts. “We didn’t have any buggies that I can remember. It was just a regular flatbedded cart hooked up to one horse.” The first cars more or less followed the same paths, “fighting the sand” and devising ways to avoid mud holes.

Boats were a primary mode of transportation before roads were paved and the Oregon Inlet Bridge was built. Each family had their own sail skiffs, and could recognize each other from a distance by the particular cut of boat and sail. An elderly Avon resident had been bedridden for three months. The day before he died in 1927, he amazed the household by springing out of bed to announce that he had seen his son’s sail out of the upstairs window.

My grandfather hollered to my mother, “Here comes Loran, there’s his sail!” Now, he hadn’t been out of bed in three months. My mother said she looked and here he comes

down the stairs. He had put on clean clothes. They went down to meet my father. The next morning he was dead in his bed. It was, was adrenaline, I guess.

Bankers were able to secure transportation on freight and mail boats. The old Avon post office was located near the sound, unlike the modern office on Highway 12, because it afforded easier access to the mail boat running from Manteo to Hatteras. The mail boat was “26 or 28, 30 feet long with a long cabin all the way back where passengers and freight were kept.” He said that all passengers rode the mail boat, as did the “drummers” or salesmen who would stop to take orders. The freight boat would later deliver those orders.

In Avon, because of the swampy eastern side, lack of docks, and shallow waters, the mail and freight boats would anchor two hundred yards offshore and offload into a smaller boat.

An old man with a shoving skiff, a skiff propelled by a pole or an oar, would push out, board the mail boat while she’s drifting a little bit, and unload passengers and freight and mail. He had an old horse named Charlie and an old cart, and if the tide was low he would just take his old horse and wade out in the water and back the cart up to the skiff.

The smaller sail skiffs were typically tied to stakes in creeks, or pulled ashore. Islanders regularly turned the skiffs over and cleaned the hull. “My father would haul it out and scrub the bottom with sand on a rag. Let it dry. One little nick in it, and he would have to paint it, all the time.”

An old-timer recalled the very first car on Hatteras Island around 1918. “A man to Hatteras [village] had it, Ellsworth Burrus. And, he come up here on Sunday and takes out people for fifty cent a head to ride into it. That was like an airplane then.”

#### **7.4.9. Postal Service**

The Kinnakeet Post Office opened in 1873, representing a halfway point in the route to Hatteras village. Damon G. Meekins was the first postmaster. Ten years later the name was



changed to Avon Post Office. The post office was tiny, described as being the size of an outhouse with ragged boards and crooked steps. “You’d have to turn sideways to get out - you’d go in and get your mail [from the postmaster’s window] – it didn’t have any boxes.” The “whole village” gathered at Bennie’s Landing each day, “kids jumping up and down”, waiting for the whistle to blow and the mail boat to arrive:

Mr. Tom would wade out in the water and bring the bags of mail in, or bring the one letter in more than likely. He brought the freight and doled it around and we would all watch it, then wait for Mr. Charlie to overhaul the mail. Oh gosh, we wouldn’t have missed it for nothing.

“Mr. Charlie” was Charlie Williams, postmaster, state legislator, and father of the man who wrote a book entitled, *The Kinnakeeter*. Today, in 2004, old-timers still ask Avon postal workers if the mail is “hailed over yet.”

#### **7.4.10. Early Trade**

Before the windmills disappeared in the early twentieth century, Avon boats would cross the sound carrying oysters, salted spot and mullet, and other fish depending on the season, and return with corn and wheat from plantations around Stumpy Point; this grain would be ground at the village mill. They traded for a number of other products such as sorghum molasses and salt pork. A village woman declared that “in them days there was nothing nobody done” as far as regular jobs. “The men fished, that was their living.” It appears Avon had the first mills on Hatteras Island, including Barnes Mill, located on the sound side in the village (Payne 1985).

Avon villagers grew what produce they could, but until about 1947 canned goods, lumber, and other materials came by freight boat. Some of the sail-operated vessels that ran from the Outer Banks to Elizabeth City included the *Julia Bell*, operated by Walker Scarborough, and the *Missouri*, run by Avon resident Loran O’Neal.

#### **7.4.10.1. Loran O’Neal, Freight Boat Captain (Born 1897, Died 1961)**

The *Missouri* was a 56 foot-long two-masted sailing sharpie that was shallow-drafted for sound waters. The juniper vessel was built in Smyrna, a village in Carteret County on Core Sound. Its bottom was red, the hull was green, and the decking was buff. A shallow draft was especially important when the vessel was loaded with cargo. It had three sails: jib, mainsail, and a sail on the stern. To prevent leeway, or sideways drift, the *Missouri* had a large centerboard. It had metal-framed canvas bunks. There was a woodstove on board for cooking and warmth. It was rigged with a large block and tackle for heavy cargo. The *Missouri* “weren’t beautiful, but it done its job. It fed people.”

Captain Loran O’Neal worked with one crewmember, but often carried his little boy as well. He also ran a bugeye, or a cross-planked V-bottom sailing vessel with two masts, called the *Duncan*. This vessel, built in the Chesapeake Bay region in 1886, proved a bit too deep-drafted for the shoals and shallows of Pamlico Sound. One night a freak March blizzard blew it ashore at Buxton. The captain’s son L.P. O’Neal (Figures 7.4.6. and 7.) explained what happened when his parents and grandfather were anchored in the sound in the spring of 1937.

My grandfather got daddy up and said, “Loran, you better come up here there’s something not right.” Daddy said he got up and you could hear a roaring. From the time he got shoes on, the boat lurched, broke the anchor chain, and broke the forward mast out of it. A blizzard! She went right across the southern reef...to Buxton. There wasn’t nothing there then but a marsh. The bowsprit went right up...in the sand. My mother walked off of that.

Three months later Captain O’Neal, using the “bedways and rollers” technique, got the vessel back in the water. The *Duncan* was eventually scuttled in Pamlico Sound:

The worms got her and she wasn’t worth fixing. They towed her out to the edge of the channel, poured gas inside of her, set her on fire, and she burnt and sunk out there. I saw it with my fish finder, saw that little rib sticking up out of the sand.

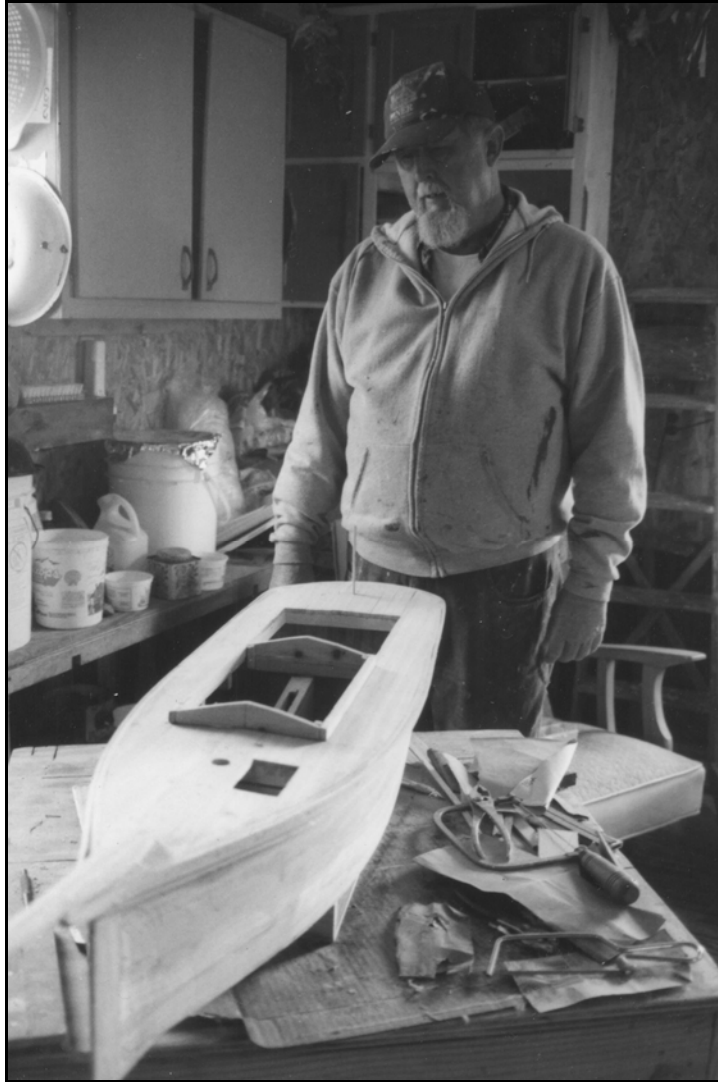


Figure 7.4.6. L.P. O'Neal Working on Model of Father's Freight Boat. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake



Figure 7.4.7. L.P. O'Neal and Garden, Avon.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Before running freight, Captain O'Neal, described by his son as a “short little guy” who received kisses on his bald head from a much taller wife, operated a barge in the early 1920s, transporting iron ore to Bangor, Maine. His new bride Ida Mae and father George Howard accompanied him; Ida Mae cooked for the crew of a half dozen men. She brought her first-born child aboard in 1924, and in 1927 they stopped running ore and purchased the freight boat from Avon resident Charlie Williams.

Captain O'Neal had a Coca-Cola franchise, and along with general freight distributed Cokes or “dopes” throughout the island, as well as NuGrape soda pop, RC Cola, Nehi and Double Cola:

They called “cokes” dopes back in those days. Coca-cola had cocaine in it up until 1937. We used to have a great big garage like a warehouse, and it was always stacked with drinks and things. He hauled freight, tombstones, and lumber, whatever anybody wanted he'd haul it.

His wife collected money from island stores, often with children in tow. “She didn't take no bull off nobody,” attested her son. He claimed that she never had trouble collecting from

Chicamacomico accounts, but Buxton and Frisco was another story. “One time I went with my mother to go down and collect, this guy ran out of the backdoor of the store. My mother saw him and hollered, come on.” Ida Mae O’Neal was greatly respected by her family for her hard work, as expressed by her son:

I’ve heard certain people say that women were second-class citizens back in them days. No, they weren’t second-class citizens; they loved their family. I went to church one time, and I heard this woman say that in Sunday school class I got up and left. All I could see was my mother’s red hands where she was washing me and my sister’s clothes out there by hand on the washboard.

Captain Loran O’Neal’s route went from Avon to Elizabeth City, where he’d pick up freight. It took the Missouri one day to get there, and the crew would work late into the night loading cargo. The next morning they would set sail for Hatteras Island. The vessel had a “little donkey boat with a little one-cylinder engine in it” that they would use to tow the [the *Missouri*] down river until reaching the sound. “You got the turning buoy, and then you would hoist the little boat up on the stern, and then you’d set the sails and sail down.” The crew gathered water by dropping a bucket overboard “out of Elizabeth City around the buoy and that water tasted sweet.” Water was stored in an old whiskey barrel with a burned-out interior. His son recalled a time when his father fell “asleep at the wheel” after a long night of loading freight, and plowed into a fisherman upriver:

My father was coming through Alligator River early in the morning. They’d been up there through Outfall Canal, picked up a load of lumber. He said he heard somebody cussing, and he looked there weren’t a guy with him. They had run in a pound net, and the guy was fishing his nets. He’d run the freight boat right in guy’s pound net stakes.

When Captain O’Neal reached Hatteras Island, he stopped in Rodanthe, Buxton, and Hatteras, finally returning to Avon late that day. “Going up we would have beef hash and corn fritters,” recalled his son, who often accompanied his father. “Coming back we would have the

same thing with string beans and corn in it, so it was more like a soup, and still have corn bread.”

Sometimes the captain baked biscuits and oyster fritters.

The freight boats transported lumber to New Inlet at Pea Island when a new bridge was getting constructed over the storm-cut channel:

They'd go up out Fall Canal over here and bring back a load of lumber and five gallons of corn whiskey each trip. It was made up there around Out Fall Canal and Columbia. They had all those workers building the bridge. They'd take a little sip every once in awhile I imagine.

The freight boat captain transported passengers free of charge. Passengers experienced the vessels by sail until the late 1930s when gas engines were installed. Captain O'Neal installed two straight-eight Buick engines in 1939:

I remember folks around here who used to crank engines with their feet. They would turn the key off, turn the engine over, get the crank up, turn the key on, and push the crank down. It was a dangerous thing. My father got slammed against the side of the engine cabin many a times because the engine would kick back. He had a gouge right through his nose.

When “gas boats” began replacing sail skiffs in the early 1920s, gas was ten to twelve cents per gallon. Most profitable for Captain O'Neal were the government contracts during the Depression to haul coal to Coast Guard stations.

The *Missouri* finally met her demise in the 1944 storm after washing across the island to the ocean and breaking in two.

She broke the anchor chain, she went out to Mill Creek, went across the land, and the mast took the telegraph lines down. She went to sea and broke in half. The bow was up around little Kinnakeet Coast Guard station on the beach, and the stern went down to Creeds Hill just north of Hatteras. A man to Hatteras asked my father if he could have the engines and shaft and daddy give it to him.

Although Captain O'Neal quit running the freight boat after the *Missouri* was destroyed, the completion of Highway 12 on Hatteras Island in 1950 brought about the end of the freight boat business as a whole. Captain O'Neal finished out his life commercial fishing, after converting a

cabin boat used for hunting guides, the *L.P. Jr.*, into a little trawler. He died at age 64 one September after catching a 47 pound red drum off the beach.

My mother told him, “Loren you don’t need to go today”. She said he was gray looking, his skin. He said, “Yeah, I’m going.” He went up there, put his line out, caught one 47 pound (red drum), brought it back up, put it in the truck, and fell dead on the beach. He told me plenty of times when I go, I’m going over there.

A Coast Guard supply boat called the “AB 21” ran freight and supplies from Elizabeth City to Coast Guard stations along the coast. Revenue officers commissioned the boat to take them to bootleg hotspots such as East Lake and Mann’s Harbor where corn whiskey was made. Captain Obie, who Manson Meekins was boarding with in Elizabeth City while he attended school, ran the vessel. Meekins relayed a humorous story that involved Loran O’Neal.

One evening I saw men unloading five-gallon jugs of corn whiskey that they had captured down around East Lake. Mr. Obie said, “My God Manson, get you a jar.” So I got a quart jar and he took the plug out of one of those five gallon jugs and dumped me a quart of whisky. I really didn’t drink so I took that jar and went out in the back yard to a huge circle of lilies and sat that quart jar down into the middle of those lily pads.

A few days later, Meekins met the freight boat run by Loran O’Neal of Avon.

I went down to visit [O’Neal], find out how things were going down in Avon. And I said, “Loran, would you like to have a quart of whiskey?” And he was quite jubilant. I gave it to him aboard that boat. And the next time I saw Loran, I said, “How was that whiskey I gave you?” He said, “My God, Manson, it almost killed all of us! It made us all sick!”

Avon was known for boat building. An early boat builder was Farrow Scarborough, and a more recent builder was Willie Austin who sold boats by the foot. Austin, like all the traditional boat builders, kept his calculations “all in his head” rather than in boat plans. When old-time builders did sketch out a figure, it was typically in pencil on a scrap of wood or on the shed wall. He built smaller boats than his predecessors, from skiffs to forty-footers. He obtained his lumber from Elizabeth City. One of his skiffs sits on land before a set of rental cottages today, in 2004, with “Avon Cottages” painted on it.

[Austin] built sailboats, little motorboats, and stuff like that. He was good at it. One day we could see my father's sails off the back porch. My mother took me down to the landing when I was six years old. Willy Austin had built me a sailboat towed by my father and, about part of the way in, my father turned it loose, and let it sail in towards the shore. My mother said "I couldn't even hold you. You got in the boat and headed right into the sound."

One long-term resident talked about the cedar trees in Avon and how that sustained the boat building trade. Builders used "a hammer, hatchet, a plane, and for sand paper they would take a rag, dip it in the water, and put sand on it," or use "wet leather with sand on it." Planks were cut with saws and the keel was shaped with an adze. They steamed and bent frames with a block and tackle.

#### **7.4.10.2. The Eel Grass Industry**

In 1912 postmaster C.T. Williams II of Kinnakeet started a seaweed harvesting business, after the discovery of a neighbor led to a way to market the endless rafts of eelgrass drifting in Pamlico Sound.

A neighbor, walking along the docks in Norfolk, happened to see a number of bales of...seaweed known as eel grass. Since eel grass grew in great profusion in Pamlico Sound...William's neighbor copied down the name and address on the bales...Williams immediately wrote to C.T. Winchester in Baltimore, asking what the baled eel grass was used for, what Winchester paid for it...Eel grass, the Baltimore buyer said, was used as packing in the manufacture of mattresses and stuffed furniture, and it was also used for putting the final polish on fine wooden furniture. Further, the demand far exceeded the supply... (Stick 1958, 233).

Williams employed 30 to 40 Kinnakeeters to harvest, dry, and bale seaweed. Crews collected great rafts of the eelgrass, known locally as "sea oars" or "sea horse," in sound waters from Avon to Buxton on flat barges. Williams bought the barge and other equipment, and Farrow Scarborough ran the business.

Villagers also collected mounds of the grass that broke loose and blew to shore each



June, and spread it out on drying racks in the sun. “It breaks loose from the reef every June and gets ashore,” explained a resident. “God Almighty, it gets rotten – it will turn your house black.”

Crews turned the drying eelgrass with pitchforks. Once dry, the grass was taken to a building “south of the post office landing” and baled with a “sealer-baler.” “It was a compression unit which put that seaweed in a bale, maybe four or five feet long and maybe two feet high and two feet wide,” recalled a villager. “And they would press it down with a hard presser and put [baling] wire around it, put [the bales] back on their flats, take it on freight boats to places like Elizabeth City.” Another method would be to employ a boy to “jump up and down on the grass until it was tightly packed” (Dunbar 1956, 136).

Some four additional villagers established seaweed businesses in the area as well. Farrow Scarborough was in the business, and built his own seaweed baler with parts ordered at an iron foundry in Elizabeth City. He owned the 54-foot freight schooner *Julia Bell*, on which he transported seaweed bails to Elizabeth City and returned with general merchandise for island stores (Hooper 1983). Tom Gray and Fields Meekins each employed about 10 villagers as well (Stick 1958). The increased harvest of seaweed was a blessing for the community - not only because of the income it generated, but because there was a use for the eel grass that otherwise rotted at Avon’s shore. A seaweed blight known as wasting disease destroyed this already declining industry around 1930; lack of grass also destroyed the bay scallop fishery and caused waterfowl, especially brant (*Branta bernicla hrota*) to starve, in turn crippling the sport guiding business (Stick 1958, 232-233).

#### **7.4.11. Commercial Fishing**

Oysters were a significant part of the fishing industry from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup>. A man traced his ancestry back to his great, great, great grandfather, who had two

Pamlico Sound schooners called the *Resolute* and the *Worthington*. “During the Civil War they got fired on from the ocean side because they didn’t know whether it was Confederate boats or not – they were fishing boats. Here they didn’t want to side with either one.” An old-timer remembered two large sailing schooners in Avon that were used to harvest and transport oysters.

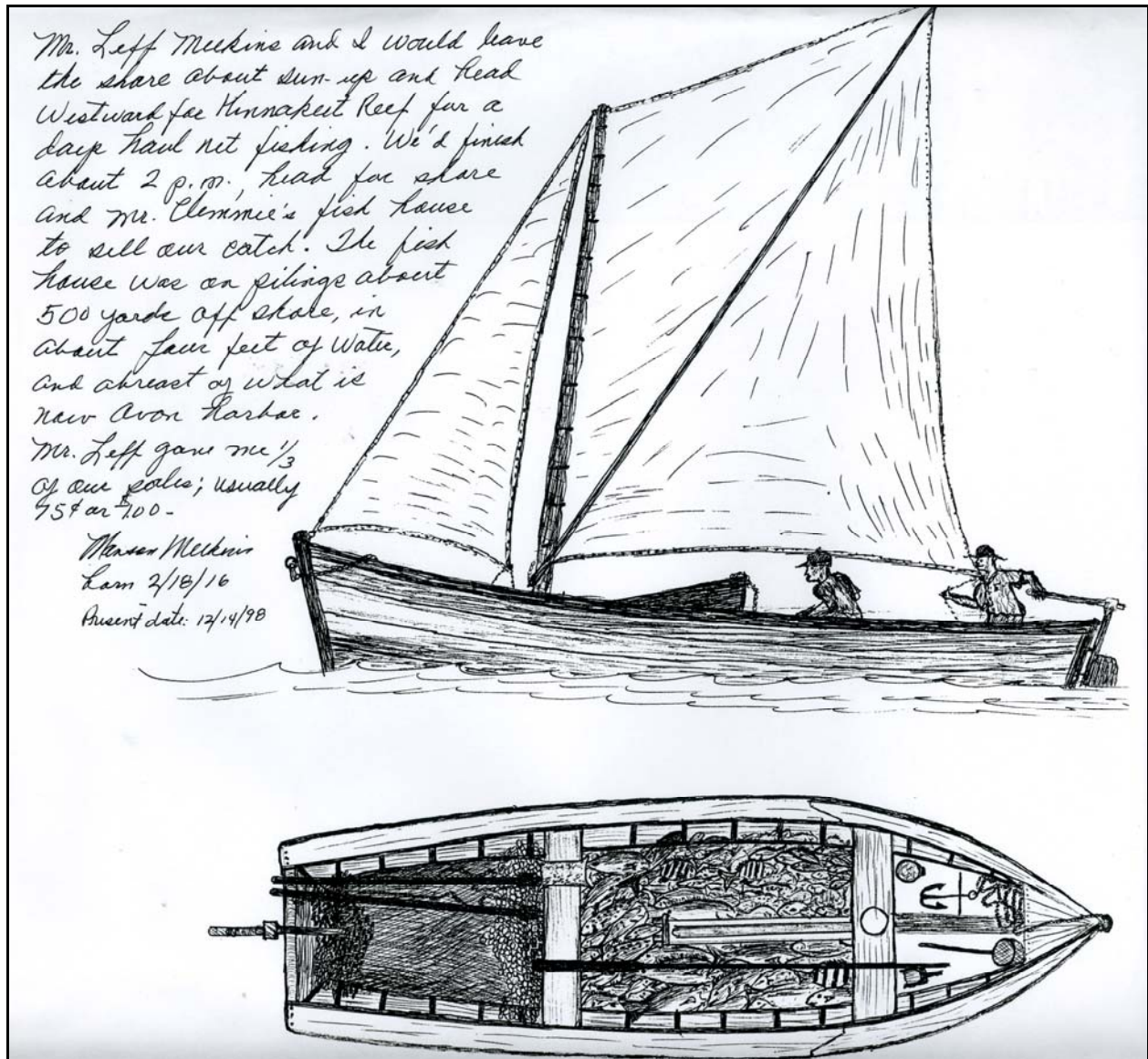
[The schooner captains] would leave here in the fall during oyster season and go over around Stumpy Point or Mann’s Harbor or across the sound gathering oysters which they would take to Elizabeth City and sell. My wife’s grandfather, Mr. Warren Davis O’Neal, he and his brothers operated one called the *Margaret Anne*.

As there was no harbor in Avon until the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dug a T-shaped one in 1947, vessels “were anchored or moored to stakes” along the soundside shore. The freight boat *Missouri* was anchored off Avon or on the backside of Big Island near Mill Creek.

Although most shipwrecks along the Outer Banks are assumed to be along the ocean side, it was typical for soundside vessels to wash ashore or sink during bad storms as well.

During real severe storms vessels would break their moorings and wash ashore. The *Missouri* washed ashore during a storm near Buxton. The bugeye *Duncan* washed in near shore where she floundered and was destroyed. The *Margaret Anne* went ashore up north of Avon. That was a two-masted schooner. [People] would eventually get them off but, over time, the storms and stuff would contribute to their demise.

Most of the Avon fishermen worked small sail skiffs. “You took your sail wrapped around your mast and wade it out to your skiff, step the mast, unfurl the sail,” explained a villager. “It was a triangular sail called a sprit sail. A sprit is a long pole that ran from the foot of the mast near the boat’s seat up at an angle which pushed the clew (the corner of the sail) way up so the wind would catch it.” Also there was “a jib - a triangular little sail up in front of the boat. It ran from the mast forward where the main sail ran from the mast aft” (Figure 7.4.8). The sail skiffs rarely capsized under such able sailors. “For balance they had bags of sand. When it was blowing hard and they were running side to, they would shift the sand bag over to the high side to keep the boat more on an even keel.”



Mr. Leff Meekins and I would leave the shore about sun-up and head westward for Hinnakeet Reef for a day haul net fishing. We'd finish about 2 p.m., head for shore and Mr. Clemmie's fish house to sell our catch. The fish house was on pilings about 500 yards off shore, in about four feet of water, and abreast of what is now Avon Harbor.

Mr. Leff gave me  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our sales; usually \$58 or \$70.

Manson Meekins  
 Lam 2/18/16  
 Present date: 12/4/98

Figure 7.4.8. Traditional Sail Skiff. Illustration by Manson Meekins.

Fishermen would typically set gill nets in the evening by fixing ten or fifteen nets to a stake in Pamlico Sound. They would stay with the nets all night, fishing them and preventing crabs from eating their catch. “And all during the morning hours just after daylight, you’d see them coming in their sailboats, sail skiffs.”

Some fishermen worked in daylight hours “hauling” in crews of three. “They’d take this net out and run it out into the little gulleys and sloughs and pull it up on the shore and scoop up

fish.” Six or eight long haul crews worked out of Avon through the 1970s. Half were crews from Kitty Hawk and Collington, who would sleep on their boats all week and drive home in cars for the weekend. Crews were usually made up of four men. Today, in 2004, only one long haul crew works out of Avon.

Fishermen also worked pound nets, “which are fish weirs or traps set out in the sound where they have these long stationary lead nets. The fish follow along the lead and become entrapped into the weirs.”

Fishermen sought a variety of fish including shad, trout, flounder, mackerel, spot and croaker. “In the old days croakers wouldn’t bring but about a cent a pound. Now, croakers are one of the most expensive fish. I think it’s because they keep well and export them to Japan.” Villagers ate what they could not sell, and fish was on the menu every day: “When you walked down the road in the evening and go by people’s houses you could smell fish frying almost all the time.”

My favorite is boiled fish. You boil it in salt water, you boil potatoes, you take your fish out, put a piece of fish on your plate, kind of chop it up a little bit, you put potatoes, then you take a handful of diced up onions and put on top of it. You then take the salt pork drippings, just cook a little piece of salt pork and use cooking oil. Then you pour that all over that, and put black pepper on top of it and have baked corn bread. Oh, my God!

In the late 1920s there was an unusual abundance of speckled trout in the sound. “There was a man here knocking them with a hammer. They were getting fifteen cent a pound – unheard of at that time.” Villagers rarely sold fish to each other, but shared the catch: “They’d always give you fish. We always do *now*. You don’t go down and buy fish off of people. They give them to you.”

Women and children collected oysters, scallops, clams, and “man’s noses,” or soft clams, as well. “Man’s noses were in a long shell. People used to boil them.” Even in the early 20<sup>th</sup>

century, some people held “shellfish leases,” a tacit, informal agreement, similar to “squatter’s rights,” in which a fisherman’s established shellfish collecting area was respected and regarded by the community as “belonging” to him.

My aunt took us down to the sound to dig clams. She had a “saw sack,” they called them. It was a brown sack. And she was filling it up. We was going around feeling for clams. By and by, we heard somebody on the shore side say, “Get out of my clam bed!” Come to find out she was in somebody’s clam bed. And, all that time, there come a hole in her bag and she was losing the clams!

Islanders were not inclined to waste resources, and usually consumed, traded, or sold everything they harvested. “People would get what they wanted; they didn’t overdo. They didn’t waste stuff.” They enjoyed hogfish, mullet, and spot – the spots were cut open, cleaned, salted, and hung on the line to dry. A woman remarked that she liked every sort of fish but bluefish, because it gave her “the sparkle eye.” “When I’d eat a piece of bluefish,” she explained mysteriously, “the sparkles would come in my eye.” Children enjoyed wading out to the channel to catch big crabs or “channelers” with a dip net.

An Avon old-timer pointed out that September of 1957 marked the beginning of crab potting on Hatteras Island, and he was among the first use this type of trap. Before then, crabbers used trotlines – long lines that were baited in several places and then slowly pulled in. Pots, invented in Maryland, were available from a man in Wanchese for two dollars apiece. Villagers in Chicamacomico were the first to try. “We found out two men in Salvo has got something to catch crabs. So, we went up there to find out about it. They said, ‘We’ve got to go to Wanchese and take our crabs. We can bring you back 20 pots.’” They got bait (menhaden) from pound net fishermen and set the pots off Avon the next day to skeptical remarks from villagers. “George Gray looked at the pots and said, ‘What are you going to do, catch mockingbirds with those traps?’”

By one o'clock they had all 20 set, and anxiously returned to the first pots to see how they had done.

We couldn't hardly lift the pot up because it was so full of crabs. From ten pots we filled a big fish box full of jimmy crabs and they were only set for three hours. What a surprise! Before then all anybody'd do was take a dip net and get just enough crabs to eat. That's what started crabbing down here.

Fish dealer George Gray, who had made fun of the pots, eventually began furnishing crabbers with bait and paying four cents a pound for the crabs. The word got out, and fishermen from villages south began using crab pots as well. "They found out about it in Buxton. They came up here investigating. They hadn't seen any pots either. They began to get them in Hatteras and spread it on to Ocracoke."

Through the 1960s the network of people who supported commercial fishing included the men, women, and children who made fishing nets. "I never bought a net in my life," reported a fisherman, who worked with both cotton and multifilament. "I hang my own nets. As a matter of fact my son is using my nets now." Women sewed nets outside and inside their homes throughout the winter and sometimes into the evening. Instead of lead weights, men used to dip the end of a "fly tail" net into tar and then into sand in order to create bottom weight or a "lead line." "It held the bottom of the net down, anchor it to the bottom, and they would always stick a stake, a little yaupon stick, and tie the net to it." Cotton nets were dipped in a lime solution each week. "Everybody had a lime barrel along the shore. You had to hang them up and dry them because cotton nets would rot." Some men fished with linen nets, which was finer than cotton but stronger. "Those caught," recalled a fisherman, "My God they caught."

Before the harbor was dug, the Pamlico waters off Avon's shore were dotted with stilt houses in water deep enough for freight boats to offload their cargo. The freight boats would also pick up iced fish and deliver it to Elizabeth City. Early stilted houses were run by Watson

Gray and Harris Miller (Williams 1975) and were landmarks for Avon long after they fell into disuse. Each house had “a big hole in the floor, and the little boat would go under the fish house,” explained a Kinnakeeter. “They would drop a basket down, put the fish in it, and pull it up.” A buy-boat collected the fish from the various houses. By the 1930s with the availability of ice, buy-boat captains “would ice the fish and carry them to Rodanthe” to load on a boat bound for Globe Fish company in Elizabeth City. C.C. “Clemmie” Gray had an ice house, set out in the four foot-deep channel about 500 yards offshore in Pamlico Sound (Figure 7.4.9). Three hundred pound blocks of ice were hauled up to the stilted house by block and tackle; the ice was stored on the north side of the house in wood shavings, while fish was iced and packed in the south end. Two large oil barrels at the ice house were filled with kerosene and gasoline, which was pumped via underwater pipes to mainland Kinnakeet and sold to villagers for a variety of uses. The ice house was eventually destroyed in a storm and Clemmie Gray built a new fish house at the harbor, later operated by his son George. Clemmie Gray also built a fish house in the North’ard section of Kinnakeet. Other fish house owners included Edward Scarborough, Sumner Scarborough, and Fields Meekins. Today, in 2004, Avon Seafood is the only fish house in Avon, and one of two companies on all of Hatteras Island (Figures 7.4.10-11).

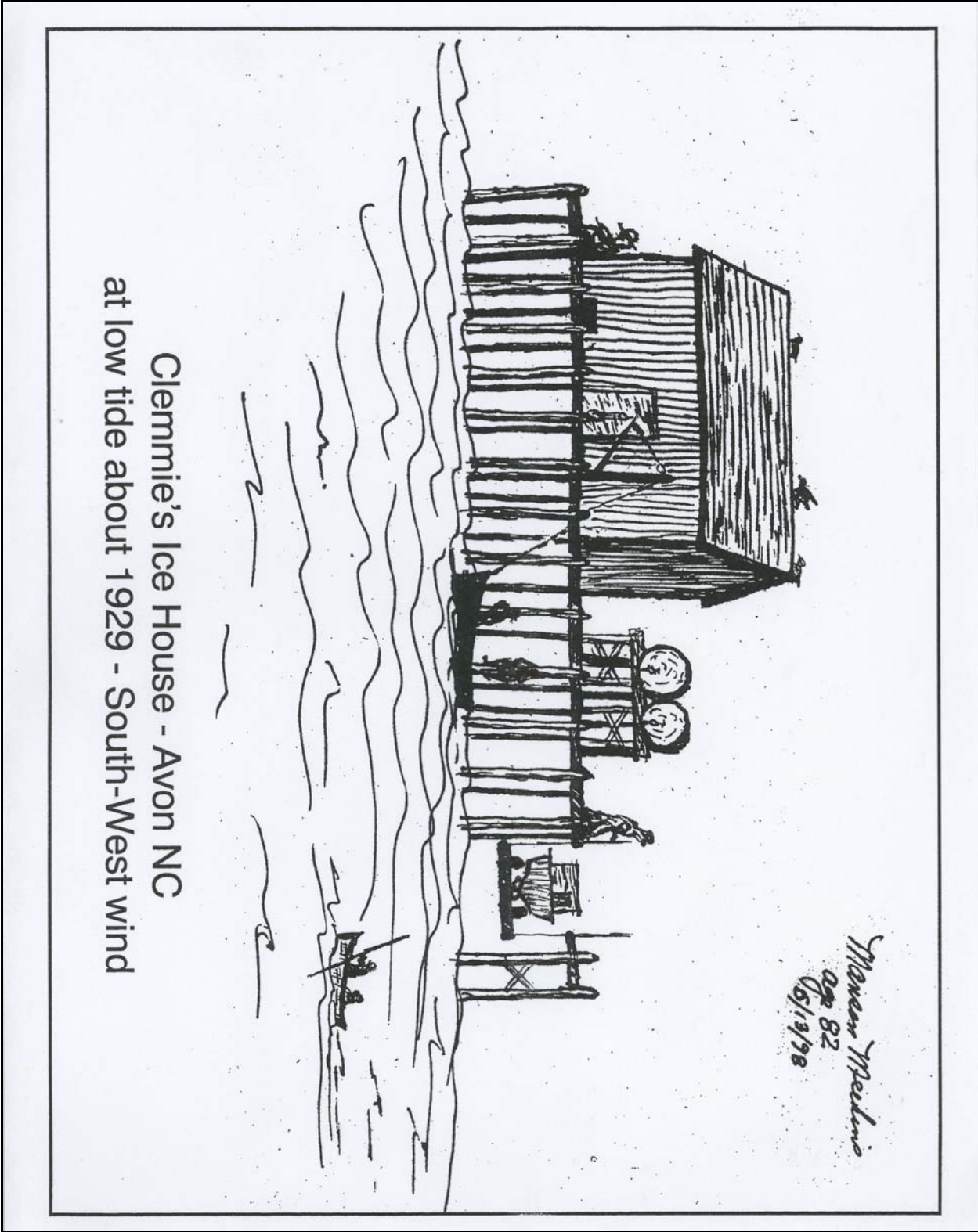


Figure 7.4.9. C.C. "Clemmie" Gray's Fish and Ice House. Illustration by Manson Meekins.





Figure 7.4.10. Unloading Fish at Avon Seafood. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.4.11. Sorting Fish at Avon Seafood. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

**7.4.12. Hunting**

In the early 1900s Kinnakeet, like several other Outer Banks locations, was considered prime waterfowl territory. Commercial and sport hunters traveled from New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia to take advantage of the rafts of waterfowl that wintered over in Pamlico Sound. To accommodate this market, Kinnakeet old-timers carved decoys out of shipwreck debris and other discarded material (Wechter 1975).

Much of the waterfowl hunting occurred in the sound, but villagers also hunted shore birds for food. Curlews and sandpipers were among those that islanders fried or stewed with pie bread. Duck, goose, and brant hunting thrived in Pamlico Sound until the mid-1930s when

wasting disease killed off the eelgrass, a primary source of food for waterfowl. The eelgrass did not come back until the late 1940s, and this period was marked by a sharp reduction in waterfowl. Manson Meekins remembered brant washing ashore dead, and geese sickly or “poor.”

You could see those flocks of geese, maybe 50 or 60 in a flock, picking any kind of grass they could find, eating sand spurs or anything. And they were so poor physically. We would run downwind on them, and some of them just couldn't get off the ground. We put them in our [waterfowl impoundment] to try to get them to grow, regain their health.

A “Yankee sportsman,” as villagers called him, had a cottage in Avon, and frequented the area to enjoy his “one man hunting club.”

He had several boats. He had men from the village take care of the decoys, paint them up, keep his boat repaired. He'd come down in the fall of the year during the duck hunting season and bring his lady friend. He would go [hunting] almost every day - guides from the village would take him out to the reef, tie him out, put him in his blind, his hunting box, and they would take sail skiffs and sail up and down rallying fowl, scaring them up, so they would fly into the hunter.

The villagers would stand on Mill Landing hill, the “highest promontory that we had,” and keep a lookout for the hunters. They would meet the “Yankee sportsman” and any companions he had at day's end to watch the men divide the take in an interesting method that ensured fairness: One man turned his back to the piles of duck and, without looking, would declare who got what pile as the portions were called out:

The village would try to go down to the shore about dark and meet the hunters. [The hunters] would anchor the decoy skiff and bring the fowl in and put them on the shore. If he had three fellows hunting with him that day, they would pile the wildfowl in three piles. They'd divide them so many ducks, so many brant. Then the one guy would turn his back. One of the other would say, “Who has this pile?” And the guy looking westward would say, “You take it.” “Well, who has this next pile?” The guy says, “Joe takes it.” And that would leave him with a pile.

Sometimes the sportsmen had so many ducks that they would sell a portion to villagers:

The villagers would buy what they could afford of the geese and the ducks and the brant. Geese sold for about sixty cents apiece and for two brant it was about sixty cents. Ducks

were about twenty, twenty-five cents apiece depending on the species, whether it was a pintail or widgeon or a redhead.

Other “sports,” or hunters wishing to be taken out by local guides, included Reverend Paxton, who would come to Avon and “shoot all week and preach on Sunday at the Methodist church.” Some hunters kept tame geese in the village and used them for decoys. Village boys would get “a big kick out of going ‘round and looking at their decoys or boats and all the expensive clothing and nice guns and things.” Freight boat captain Loran O’Neal worked as a hunting guide as well; when the New York industrialist that he assisted died, O’Neal was offered the man’s local house, land, and two boats for \$1,200. “He only had \$400, so he bought the boat. The boat was called the *Brant*. She was 30 feet long with a three cylinder Lathrop and a wood stove.”

Kinnakeeters also hunted, both commercially and for subsistence, until commercial hunting ceased upon passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

In the winter, father hunted. He had his rig, had live decoys, geese. And he’d go out and tie them out in his blind, and come in of the evening. And he’d ship his fowl [to Baltimore and New York] in barrels till they passed [the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918]. Couldn’t make enough out of it to go out there, spend all day hunting, kill fowl, just to sell around to local people.

Fowl that was shipped north was dressed in this fashion: “What they do is take their guts out, shove a handful of salt down inside of them, and pack them in barrels.” A resident’s father brought waterfowl home to eat. Her mother would bake it, or stew it with rutabagas and pie bread (pie pastry); she “didn’t put all kinds of vegetables into it then. But it made a good stew.”

Villagers’ decoys were not fancy, but fashioned “out of any piece of flotsam that would wash up on the beach.” As they lacked cypress trees, men would carve decoys from cypress fence posts that were imported to the island, or from discarded telephone poles from the old lifesaving station. They simply used a hatchet to cut the forms. At Mill Landing, Richard

Hooper kept a goose pound; the geese would be brought to the hunting waters and tethered to the bottom with a line in order to keep them in one place to attract other fowl.

Hunting methods including the use of a “laydown battery,” which was a coffin-shaped box fitting the contours of a hunter’s body. It was bordered in decking, and designed to sink level with the waterline. “If it floated too high, they would put iron ducks around it...to float it down to the right height.” A villager explained that “(laydown batteries) were so effective that ducks would come right in over your head within three or four feet and sit right down in the decoys. You could see them coming up and down wind. They’d fly in by mass - it was just murder.”

Another method involved a concrete, creosote, or wooden cube or “curtain box” (also known as a sink box or cheese box) that was watertight and ringed with a wooden plate and gasket that housed a “canvas circular structure about three feet high.” Guides would sink the box and secure it to the bottom with sandbags. Hunters climbed in the box and raised the canvas as needed to stay low in the water while keeping the submerged box dry. The box was surrounded by floating latticework that helped break rough water and prevent it from entering the box. This was called the “wing” or “sea breaker.” “All you could see from a distance was just this massive flock of [decoy] ducks. It was a very effective method,” a Kinnakeeter recalled.

Strict hunting restrictions passed in 1918 limited the amount of waterfowl that could be shot, and outlawed the laydown battery and the sit-up battery (similar to the laydown battery). The batteries were viewed as too effective in sneaking up on fowl and “unsportsmanlike.” Villagers were cognizant and respectful of the new laws, but were isolated on the Banks and rarely saw a game warden at either the north’ard hunting grounds or the south’ard (Figures 7.4.12-13).

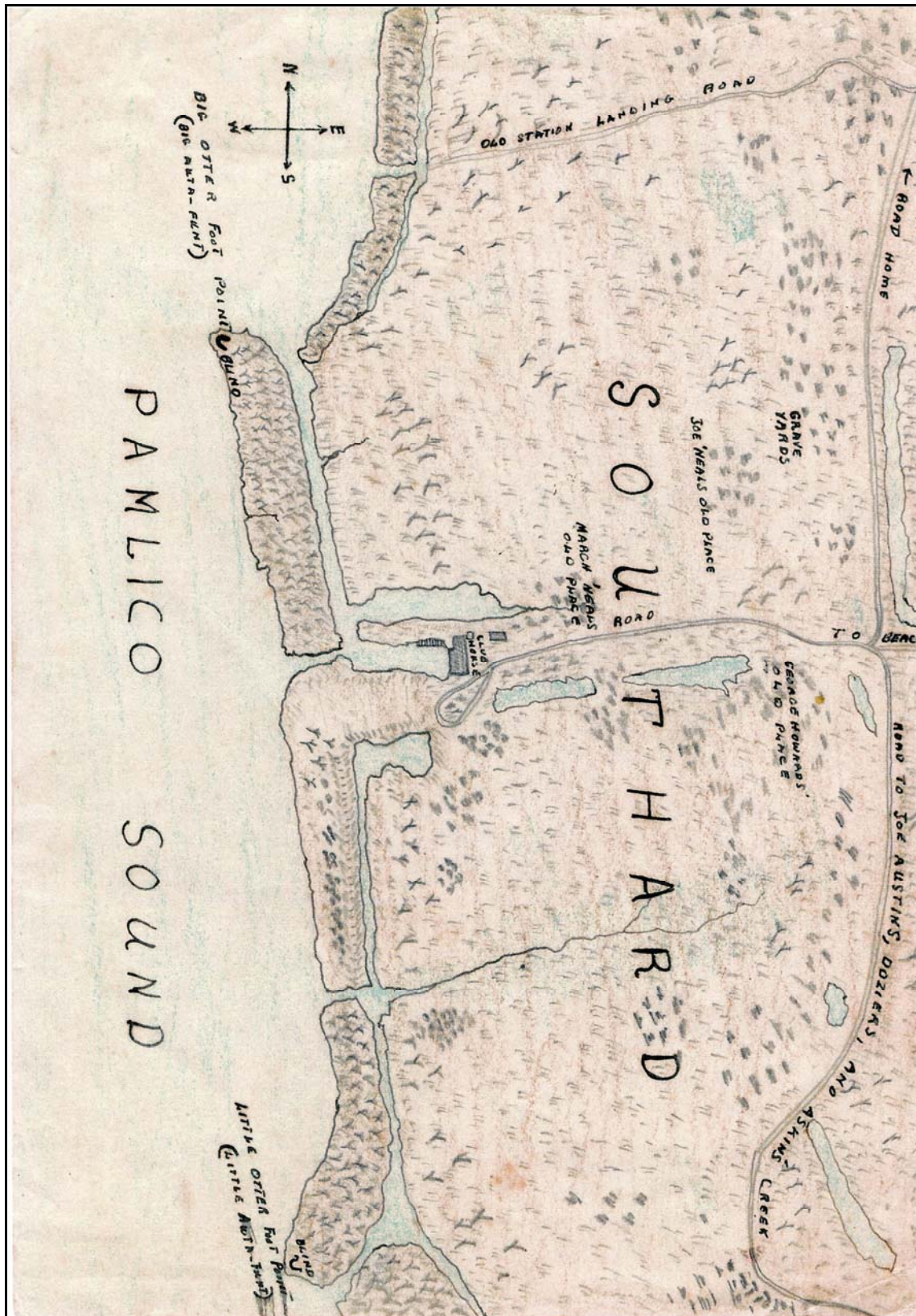


Figure 7.4.12. South'ard Hunting Grounds. Illustration by Manson Meekins.

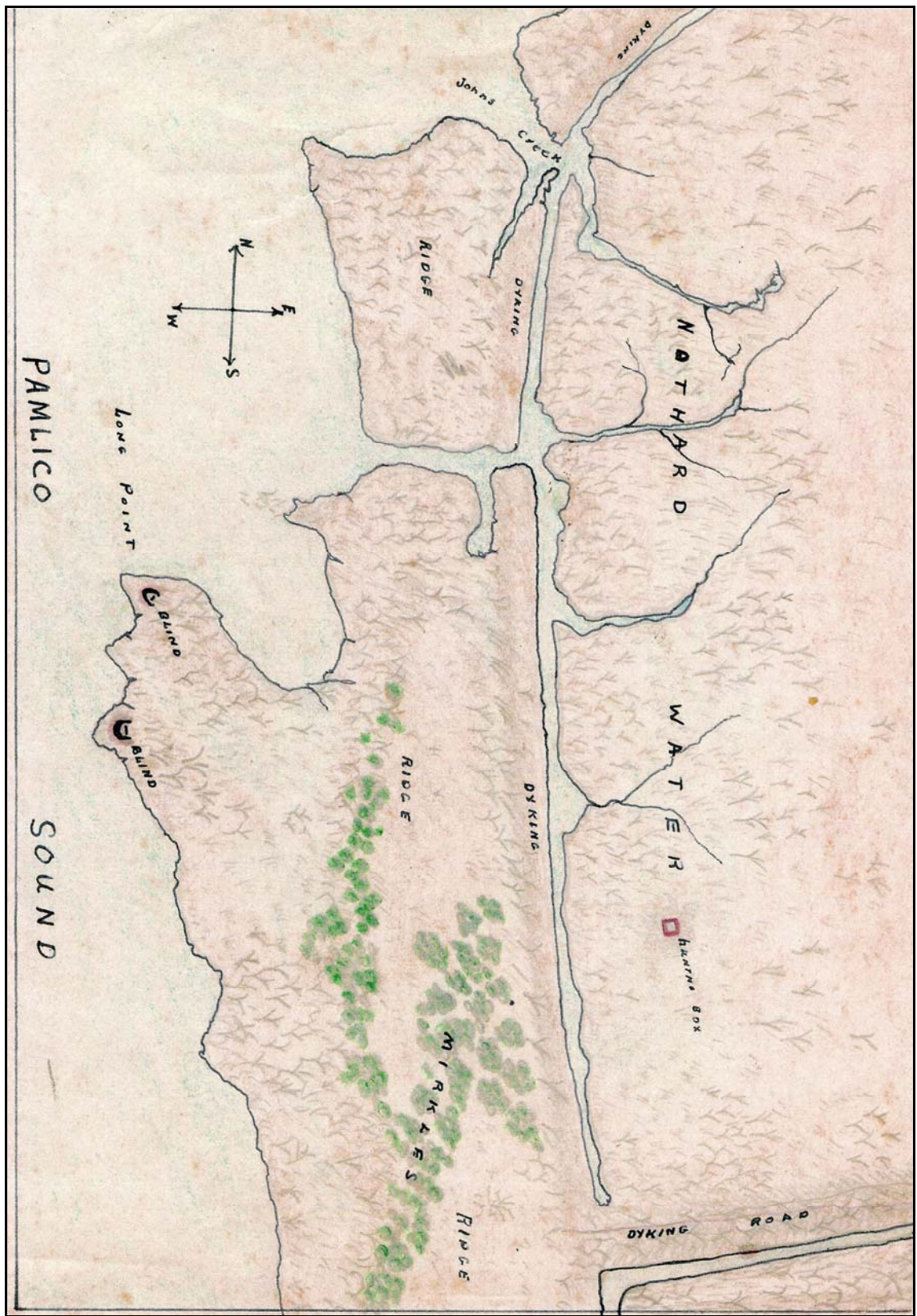


Figure 7.4.13. South of South'ard Hunting Grounds. Illustration by Manson Meekins.

### 7.4.13. Livestock and Gardening

Produce, “if we had any, was mostly grown.” Villagers usually had gardens, and surfmen often grew vegetables at stations such as Little Kinnakeet. “He raised just about everything,” said the daughter of a Little Kinnakeet crewman. “Peanuts, strawberries.” Families grew collards, cabbage, and potatoes. An Avon old-timer felt that today’s gardens are not as successful, because people “stand and spray” instead of soaking the roots with water poured from a can.

Families typically had milk cows; a villager fondly recalled that their cows were named Levy and Brighty. One Avon family traded property for a dairy cow:

My father had a piece a land to Frisco and he traded that to a man to Hatteras for this Jersey cow and calf. Brought her up here and my mother would go out and milk her. She’d have a pan of soapy water and she’d go out there wash her teats and things off, and the calf would get on the other side and start to get another teat. My mother’d shove his head away until she could get so much milk.

While general stores sometimes carried canned milk, and occasionally people could purchase butter, family cows were an important source of dairy products. Kinnakeeters often made “clabber,” or soured milk curds used in preparing biscuits.

[Mother] had a milk box, she had it on the porch and it was screened in and she’d put bowls of milk in there and let it clabber. She skimmed that cream off bright yellow. Take and beat it, and she sometimes she’d sprinkle salt into it, and it would make butter. She would make clabber biscuits. She would take flour and baking powder and salt and a little bit a sugar.

Fall and winter would bring hog and “beef” killings, where men cleaned, dressed, salted, and smoked shoulders and hams. Hog intestines were turned inside out with a “waterbush stick” and cleaned in preparation for chitlins. “My mother’d cook them chitlins. They’d smell the house all up, so she got so she took them in the outhouse and had a little a little kerosene stove in there that she’d fry them onto.”



A man come down here, he was transferred in the Coast Guard from New Jersey. He would buy a steer from somebody. He'd kill it, dress it, and take it under the oak tree down there where he'd have the tables, and then he would sell it for fifteen cent a pound for the steak. The stew stuff would be ten cent a pound. He had a pair of scales hanging on a tree.

Everyone had a few chickens, and ate the meat and eggs all year long.

My mother had a coop out there that was a screened in and all, she'd put this chicken in there and feed her nothing but corn for three or four days before she killed her. Clean her out you know, of all the bugs and everything, because the chicken was the nastiest thing. They'd eat anything.

There were two windmills operating in Avon until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, one in the southern part of the village at Zeb Miller's Landing and the other on the northern border at Farrow Scarborough's Landing.

One of them was right over here on the sound, which was used to grind grain that would be brought in by boat from across the sound, like corn and wheat. They ground the flour right here. The other was up north of the village, up from Mr. Farrow Scarborough's Landing. Some of those old stones are still in evidence here in Avon. They're big stones, maybe four feet in diameter, round, with grooves cut in them where the corn, as it ground, would exude and spill over the side.

Outer Bankers were sometimes short of fresh greens, however, and this was cited as a cause for a high incidence of worms in children. The most common wild vegetation consumed was yaupon leaves, as villagers regularly made and consumed yaupon tea. A derogatory name used for Avon villagers in the late 1800s was "yaupon-chopper," in reference to people who made the traditional tea. A well-known taunt called out during ball games between Kinnakeet and Hatteras was "Kinnakeeters–Yaupon Eaters" (Figure 7.4.14).



Figure 7.4.14. “One Time Be Kind” Sports Activity Bus. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake;

Villagers owned free-ranging cattle, horses, and sheep, and later kept livestock in pens. During bad snowstorms, the free-roaming horses would “go get on these old store’s porches to get out of the snow.” From 1921-1926, as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s war against disease-carrying ticks, livestock was rounded up and dipped twice a month in a “creosote mixture” held in concrete vats. Villager Ernest Quidley led the roundups. Government inspectors oversaw the process. “They drug them through that dipping vat. They’d swim through [a formula] like Lysol mixed in five-gallon jugs. [The livestock] would get in that drip pen, slanted so that the liquid would run back in the vat.” A man painted the rump of each

freshly dipped animal with a dab of green paint, and a range rider rode along the whole island in search of any animal without the green mark.

Islanders finally gave up trying to dip the wildest of the cattle, and accepted the government's bounty of five dollars per head (MacNeill 1958). An old dipping vat remains in the village, and some question if this vat may be linked to the present-day rate cancer:

They'd take a cow up a ramp down through that vat and march him out the other side. And DDT - they'd empty the solution, pull the plug and it would run right out in the sand. So you know it got in the water. That could be the reason the cancer rate is so high. Probably a dozen in Avon right now with it. And that's a lot for a small village like that.

#### **7.4.14. Perceptions of Environment and Storms**

"There's always been some men, old fishermen, around that could look at the sky and tell what was going to happen [with the weather]." If a hurricane was coming, villagers got as much as they could off the floor in preparation of flooding.

People just felt like there was a storm coming, and finally it got there. When they left, everybody just went about their business. Water come up in the house, but the next day it was over. There was nothing it could hurt. May wash your house around a little bit. We didn't have anything. People took care of their house and parked their car on a hill.

People were switching from wood floors to Congoleum in the 1930s, which sometimes had to be removed after flooding, but was not as troublesome as present day homes with carpeting. In recent years Avon homes were flooded in hurricanes Gloria (1985) and Emily (1993), but unlike Hatteras Village and Rodanthe, were spared in Isabel (2003) and Alex (2004).

Old timers recall when the beach was "flat as a shield" before the Depression-era dune building began. Houses were built sturdy enough where storm winds were sometimes not audible from inside, although a villager recalled hearing "water gurgling under the house." The extreme weather events compelled everyone to be "seafaring sailors."

“There were no dunes in them days,” attested Captain O’Neal’s son. “We used to stand on the front porch, and you could watch your breakers roll up on the beach. There’s a lot more vegetation now than there was then, because people burned everything back in them days in their stoves and stuff.”

“When the sea was just a little rough,” agreed Manson Meekins, “you could see the ocean waves riding in.” He stressed the flatness of the beach that was just “white sand and shells, and the frequent ocean overwash.” With the exception of some large live oak trees, marsh grass, “water bushes,” yaupon and myrtle bushes, he recalled little vegetation in Avon, and attributed this to both the saltwater overwash and free-roaming livestock.

Several times a year, the tide, the ocean, would run over the beach. Come on down through the area, run through the villages, through the creeks. Kill most of the vegetation from that salt water. But then, in those days they had cattle, cows, and horses, sheep, and hogs, running wild and some domesticated all over the island. They seemed to keep the vegetation nipped off along with the damage wrought by the saltwater.

He recalled small hills or dunes near the village toward the sound side that had “blown up when the original island was first made from blowing sand.” Trees grew in the smaller hills. “But the remarkable thing,” he added, “is the hills, the sand dunes along the ocean begun when the CC boys, that’s the Civilian Conservation Corps, moved in in the early [1930s].”

They planted grass, built sand fences along the beach, and the blowing sand kept building up. When a dune would reach a height above the sand fence, they’d put another sand fence on top of that. Those are the hills that you see all along our coast today. The sand fences are way down below most of them. As the grass grew on top of them, blowing sand caught on the grass and the hills keep growing higher, thank the Lord.

The Corps had a camp just southwest of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, adding to a collection of cabins and buildings later used by National Park Service and Army personnel. An elderly resident said that her mother recalled thick trees and vines from Avon to Buxton:

When she was a girl growing up, that there used to be grape vines and vines all the way out here on the oceanside, before you get to the ocean. From here to Buxton it was a

thick, lot a trees, she said. She has been there when different ones, the boys and girls, would get on, swing on them trees all the way down to Buxton.

The creeks that cut from ocean to sound were clear and full of fish and crabs when he was growing up in the 1920s. But after the dike was built, the dunes developed, and the dredging and pumping of sand for restoration efforts after the Ash Wednesday storm of 1962, the creeks “almost disappeared” and are not “staying open anymore.”

The 1944 hurricane that hit the banks on September 14 devastated Avon more than any other village. The sand wall dike built during the 1930s by the CCC prevented the storm surge from sending over-wash from the sound into the ocean and, instead, flooded the village. A resident recalled a Red Cross report that calculated “98 percent of the houses in Avon was washed off of the blocks and away from the land.” A section of her house was pushed across the road, over the sand hills, and near the dike or “diken.” The Red Cross “drug it back,” and her family was unharmed. “The wind come around to the west, we knew we was going to get it then, so we all went up to Mr. Fields’. He lived on a hill, and that house was packed with people, even on the stairways.” Houses that floated to the beach were dragged back to the village with the “bedway and roller” system, where “where you lay planks down on the sand, you take rollers and put under the shills and you have a horse, truck or something pull it.” By storm’s end, 96 out of 115 houses had washed off their foundations or were destroyed (Barnes 1995). Captain O’Neal’s house did not float off its foundation:

When my father built the house they put a great big chimney block under the house, a big concrete slab that comes clear up to the floor, the house sat down on the chimney and the chimney held it. If you look at the side of the house down that way, the house is warped a little bit like this where it wanted to go that way. Each end tried to go, but the middle stayed the same and that’s why there’s a little bend there.

Several Avon villagers moved to Buxton after that storm. Even the long-gone ancestors did not escape unscathed in the 1944 storm. “A whole graveyard out that way blew out, the

skeletons was laying there with the buttons where they rotted off of the shirts. They dug them all up and took them down the road and buried them in another graveyard.”

Ships foundered, including one that littered the beach with tires and inner tubes. A resident recalled several crewmen who drowned during the storm.

They had four, five of them stretched out in a Little Kinnakeet boathouse where they all drowned. There was one of them they didn't find. They said he wandered off into the woods, and they found one of them later a few months after that in the woods. He wanted to go over there and die.

Many houses in Avon were flooded during hurricane Gloria in 1985. A woman described her house when she returned to the village after evacuating to her nieces in Edenton. “It come in my house knee-deep. The carpet was rolled up, mud and water down between it. Everything was soaking sopping. And, all the mud and trash.” Residents claim that Hurricane Gloria was the first storm for which FEMA and the National Guard were called in to help.

Hurricane Emily, in 1993, was also devastating to Avon residents. Many had their houses raised after experiencing flooding; some houses that were flooded several other times throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century were finally raised after that storm.

#### **7.4.15. Significant Places**

A Kinnakeeter described a half-mile long area near the Old Kinnakeet Coast Guard station south of Avon that was low, flat, and frequently flooded with ocean over wash. This created a hard-packed stretch that villagers used for horse races, as well as automobile races with “Model-T Fords, anything you could get. You could really pick up speed, probably ‘bout to 25, 30 miles an hour.” A plain just west of the “track” was a “flat, expansive grassy area” used for ball games. “People from Hatteras, Buxton, Avon would come up by sailboats and play ball.

Later they came up by automobile.” The area is now a massive development called Kinnakeet Shores with chain stores, condominiums, and vacation mansions. “I hate to see it go, really.”

The homeplace is of great significance to Avon residents. A villager pointed out that he lived in the very house he was born in, and continued to sleep in the same room that his mother gave birth to him with the aid of a midwife. He recalled that his father had built the house for \$1,900, including “redwood doors.”

#### **7.4.16. Rituals and Community Events**

Many of the community events in Avon were affiliated with the churches. The Methodist church sponsored “Children’s Day,” where youth would come from “Hatteras and Rodanthe, and all over.” One long-term resident laments that while travel was more difficult before the advent of hard surface roads, people made more of an effort to get together. Now, she points out, people do not get together as often. Villagers congregated at one or another church for Easter and Christmas pageants or parades. An old timer recalled when Old Christmas was celebrated in Avon for “a few times, but mostly it has been at Rodanthe.” Charles Williams describes an old Christmas-like drum and fife march comprised of costumed villagers, but apparently this occurred on regular Christmas day (Williams 1975).

Weddings in Avon involved receptions where villagers would furnish the food, baking and other goodies. A couple recalled that they got married by a Justice of the Peace, as it was typical for young couples to do, traveling to county seats such as Elizabeth City or South Mills.

Until approximately 1945, funerals involved having a “watch” or “sitting up with the dead,” where community members would sit overnight with the deceased, still in their bed or laid out in the parlor. Kinnakeeters, like other Bankers, began using the services of undertakers

regularly after World War II, calling them in from Norfolk or Manteo. An elderly woman supposed a reason for sitting up with the dead was to keep rats away; “It surely wasn’t to keep the dead person from running away, was it?” There was no funeral home in Avon, but there was a villager who specialized in making coffins:

Down in the old Methodist church here, they had special lumber provided to make coffins. When a person would die, Mr. Tilman Gray, and the carpenters would move in, bring the lumber out under the oak, cut the coffin boards. I remember them sawing across the boards to make the little cuts so you could bend the boards to fit the shoulders. Then the people would cover [the coffin interior] with some sort of muslin.

A woman named Marie Hooper would be called to “dress the dead,” or wash and dress the body. The body would typically be buried three days after death, as “Christ died and rose on the third day.”

Christmas was another significant time for reunion and fellowship. A villager raised near the Coast Guard station at Little Kinnakeet would come to Avon every Christmas and stay with an aunt. They would “always have to have something extra for Christmas dinner, like wildfowl or chicken.” She noted that “if they’d killed a hog, we’d have some of that saved for Christmas. Baked meat or stewed meat. Oh, they’d cook up a sight of pies. Potato, lemon, apple.” They sometimes cooked oyster stew, adding Pamlico Sound oysters and “water, pepper and salt, and fry out salt pork. That’s the old-timey like we used to do it.” Clam chowder was cooked the same way “but you put potatoes in clams.” Nowadays islanders may use milk in their oyster stew, but clam chowder is always cooked with a water base. Christmas meals usually included corn bread and sweet potatoes as well. Girls received small gifts like dolls, but “there weren’t much to buy from them days.”

An older villager recalled when the churches began having Christmas trees and villagers would exchange gifts there rather than at home. But after a few years this practice stopped, as “a



lot of people weren't able to buy this lot of stuff, and there was a lot of people that didn't get anything. And I think they thought it was embarrassing to some of the people."

#### **7.4.17. National Park Service**

Avon residents expressed mixed feelings about the National Park Service. A woman stated that the transition to the National Seashore pitted villagers against one another to a degree, where "one was fussing because the other one had sold their land." She felt some people had been short sighted, including her father who had land "clear to the beach" that he turned over to the National Park Service; they figured "it wasn't any good, all that sand."

One villager could not recollect the meetings that were held regarding the establishment of the National Park Service, but did remember "there was a lot of flab going." She thought it was a good thing that the Park was established, or "we wouldn't even have nothing to look at."

#### **7.4.18. Coast Guard and the Military**

Avon villagers have a long history with the lifesaving service and U.S. Coast Guard. As stations were located just to the south and to the north of the village, Kinnakeeters were in a prime position to obtain government jobs, and the community was more oriented toward the lifesaving service than any other village. Politics pertaining to who received what position ran deep as well, and to this day Avon has a reputation for being a Republican stronghold on the Banks.

The Little Kinnakeet lifesaving station, located a few miles north of the village, was established in 1874 and included a few houses for crews' families, as well as a small school. Although the station was not decommissioned until 1954, the tiny community that grew up

around the station “existed in name only” by the Great Depression; families had moved to Kinnakeet proper or off-island locations (Stick 1958, 243).

Big Kinnakeet, on the south edge of the village, was established in 1878. A man whose father was a surfman at Big Kinnakeet for 30 years recalled two big “government horses” stabled next to the station. “They didn’t have tractors to pull their boats with. They had horses.” Boys would regularly go to the station to get haircuts; “they were the barbers.” The Coast Guard stations also used cisterns, first to capture rainwater and later for storing ground water. “We pumped it out of the ground into the cistern as a holding tank, and then we pumped it out of that to a filtering system. We had birds in those tanks,” said a former Surfman. “You could smell a dead bird. We’d have to clean the tank out – you always had birds build nests around the edge of a tank.”

Avon residents lucky enough to have a relative stationed at either Little Kinnakeet or Big Kinnakeet could visit them frequently. A woman, whose father joined the Coast Guard in 1922 after commercial fishing and working on dredges with the Army Corps of Engineers, recalled living in a rental cottage in Little Kinnakeet one summer. She and her brother would “come back to town in the evenings, down here in a Model-A Ford” to see their friends. Later in life she married a Coast Guardsman, and their two sons joined the Coast Guard as well, illustrating the pervasiveness of the service in villagers’ lives. She noted that the Coast Guard turned out “a lot of officers from around here.”

A Kinnakeet family traced five generations who served in the Coast Guard. Joining the Coast Guard was simply what one did; in 1958 one third of all Avon households received retirement benefits, and well over half of the village was involved in the service, counting active members (Wechter 1975). “My friends was all in the Coast Guard. They wanted me to join the

Coast Guard, so I went in the Coast Guard.” Time spent away from family was hard, as indicated by a resident who, after retiring and having one more child, called this daughter his “hand-raised kid.”

Some Avon men joined the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Depression for the dune-building project and made, according to a resident, \$21 dollars per month. A few of the CCC men brought to the island married local girls. Whereas most of the CCC workers were from not locals, the WPA program hired locals for a dollar a day to plant bushes, dig ditches and maintain “what roads there was.” Officials would “bring [WPA] checks down in an airplane.” Women had a role in the WPA program as well. The WPA set up a textile center in an old store in Avon where local women were supplied with material and sewing machines in order to make clothing for villagers. A Rodanthe woman was in charge of the project. “Somebody got one of those shirts they had made him with the pocket under the arm. They didn’t know how to sew,” said an islander. The WPA also supplied food to the island such as barrels of potatoes, canned hamburger, and tubs of butter.

Kinnakeeters, like other Hatteras Islanders, witnessed World War II activity as German U-boats bombed U.S. ships close to shore. A resident recalled hearing the attack on the cargo ship *City of Atlanta*, the oil tanker *Dixie Arrow* and the *S.S. Alexandria* as a boy. “In the summer of ’42 me and my friends...stepped in five or six inches of oil that had washed ashore where we swam, that had been covered by blowing sand overnight” (Couch 2002, 24). He also remembered a local dance hall called Ervin’s Place where soldiers danced – he and his friends sometimes rode the military horses that were tied up behind the establishment (ibid). Villagers were required to blacken headlights and keep windows curtained. “They had an Army jeep that

ran through the community,” recalled a resident. “If they saw a spark of light through the window, they’d rap on your door and tell you to shut it off.”

Fewer residents serve in the Coast Guard or military today compared to years past. Yet, the tradition continues: a villager described the stress he experienced in 2004 knowing that his youngest daughter was serving in Iraq:

I don’t help the situation with that girl over in Iraq. I went to bed last night and the dog woke me up. It was 12:58 when I looked at the clock, and I got up and let the dog out. It was after four o’clock before I got back to sleep. I’ve tried sleeping pills, went to the doctor got sleeping pills, and they don’t even work. I’m nervous all the time. It’s a burden on you.

#### **7.4.19. Political Life**

Kinnakeet mirrored Buxton’s methods of voting for lifesaving station keepers as a means of securing a government job. Avon has long been, and still is, the sole Republican holdout on the island, and the importance of the ferry system as a source of employment for villagers is reflected in the Outer Banks’ nickname of the ferry system: the Kinnakeet Navy (Personal Communication 2004). Avon village has a reputation for knowing how to work politics in securing ferry jobs, partly through Republican loyalty and connections. A villager recounts a tale underscoring the political leanings of the community:

I went to register to vote and my grandfather took me up there, and he was one of three Republicans in the village. He said go in there and register a Republican. So, I did. To me it made no difference. But, to him, he wanted more Republicans down there. I’d say it was about 50/50. But Avon’s Republican – the old village. The new people that’s moved in, I don’t know what they are. But if you’re a Democrat don’t go to Avon politicking. It won’t help.

#### **7.4.20. Law Enforcement**

Kinnakeeters had a reputation for taking care of their own disputes, and not relying on outside help. Mary Gray shared an example of how a dispute pertaining to her family and an errant hog was settled in the 1920s:

The hog weighed 300 pounds, and my father kept it in the yard. One of the neighbors kept complaining that that old hog was eating her cow feed every night. Mama said, “that can’t be, because that hog stays in that yard.” One morning we discovered she was down on the sound. Somebody had shot her. She was jumping that fence at night and going in that lady’s cow feed and coming back.

A resident recalled an informal, almost vigilante-style method of social control before sheriff’s deputies began patrolling the island regularly in 1956. Men would gather “if someone was beating his wife, and they’d beat the hell out of him.” He explained that “there was no law down there. But nothing much happened - if we needed a sheriff they come from Manteo, which was an all day trip.”

#### **7.4.21. Modernity and Perceptions of Change**

In 1988, when development was nowhere near the level it is today (2004), a villager remarked that “now we’re going to have to move to the country to get out of the city.” She stressed that “progress” has caused villagers to become less close and much busier:

There is just so much to put their minds on today that people didn’t have in those days. Everybody’s working. They just don’t have the time. I guess it’s all the modern appliances that we have today that takes our time. And, we don’t have time for visiting like people used to. One would think that the modern appliances would give you more time for things like that but it doesn’t.

She lamented that young villagers lack the ideals of past generations, and “can’t see beyond their nose.”

A Kinnakeeter spent 37 years away in the Coast Guard but with “every opportunity I

came back to Avon.” He stressed that he always loved the village. “I watched people grow up. I watched them die. I watched the changes come about.” The changes that he witnessed include the coming of electricity, the highway, an improved ferry system, better schools, and the return of Avon sons and daughters who were more worldly and educated as well as an “influx of strangers.” He felt that in the old days people were “sort of complacent.” He recalled very little “grumbling” and noted that without luxuries “people just didn’t have anything to grumble about except social affairs.” A new breed of islander is more inclined to “organize” and take “an active part” in civic or ecological movements with which old timers did not concern themselves. He viewed this more or less as a positive change. A negative change was the disinclination of young people to join the military service or work an “eight to five” job.

You see a lot of young people who are just drifting from place to place. Some of them are doing very good. Some of the people are fishing, making good at fishing, because they stick to it. It’s hard work. Others are influenced by their peers. They seek more relaxation, more hilarity, more out-of-reality experiences through drugs, alcohol.

The overall effect is that Avon and other island villages are becoming “just like another modern city.” He also regretted the loss of freedoms that go hand in hand with “progress,” and an entitlement attitude of new property owners, and gave this example:

All my life people have taken their families one particular place [on the sound shore]. They’ve worked in the water, they’ve put up their umbrellas, they take their boats in and out, but the land has been sold to people from New England or from Florida. [An Avon] family sat down on the sandy beach and looked out towards the sound. Pretty soon this person approached them and said, “You people are on my land.” She was absolutely right in what she owned legally, but do you see the change that has come about? ho would suspect that anybody in Avon would ever say, hey, you’re trespassing on my land?

A woman who raised five children in Avon pointed out that “we was all poor, but we was all satisfied. Nobody griped about nothing. Nobody had nothing; now they got everything and they want more.” She also noted an erosion of neighborliness and inter-dependence. “Neighbors

would see a thunder cloud come up and they'd come with their whole gang of kids to spend the night with you. Now it's all gone - you never see nobody no more."

The lack of class differences was appealing to villagers, as "everybody was in the same boat. There were no rich people." If one family had more wealth than the next, "there was no showing it," although at least one villager in the Coast Guard who had a more dependable income than that of a fisherman was known to get a horse and a cart and "go around collecting canned food and take it to the people that needed it." "Every month that check come in, whether it rained or shined. The others around here was fishermans. So, [my father] was always considered a good liver." A man concurred that "the big livers around Avon were the Coast Guard;" the 70 or so men associated with the island's seven stations who were receiving about \$60 dollars per month during the depression.

Since villagers were white, there was more of a curiosity about other races than hostility. An elderly woman recalled that her father would invite the black deliverymen from Norfolk to dinner; embarrassed and unaccustomed to such invitations, they would hesitate but accept.

Some of the old-timers long accustomed to living on next to nothing were overwhelmed when money began circulating. A man told a story about his grandfather who had accompanied his father for two years at sea when he worked a barge. "He told daddy, 'I'm tired. I just want to go home and walk around.'" Before returning his father to Avon, "Daddy took him to shopping" in Norfolk:

Bought him a new suit, shoes, top hat, tie, and a white shirt. He give him \$340 in cash. (Grandfather) broke down crying, said "I wish your mother Mary was here to see this." He never saw that much money in his whole life. When he come home he took a lot of that money and bought little gifts for all these pretty girls. My grandfather thought he was a lover.

A villager who now lives in Nags Head but returns regularly to his homeplace in Avon said that he grew up with “old island people,” but now “the old people have died off, so with them the village kind of died.” A villager in her nineties agreed, lamenting that her old friends have passed. Her neighbor and lifelong confidant recently died. She gestured to across the road and said:

I always looked forward to that light over there. I’d always see that light, where she’d be in the living room. I sit here night after night, and I get to thinking about her. I’m the only one that’s living up this way.

In recent years, drug abuse and related crimes have become more prevalent in Avon than other villages. This is of great concern to Kinnakeeters who have attended funeral after funeral for youth who overdosed on prescription drugs or heroin. A former sheriff’s deputy reported that he experienced “homicides, suicides, everything [on the island]. In Avon [substance abuse] is the worst.” He felt drugs were a particular problem in this village because “the law never messed with Avon. And the law was never that aggressive as far as drug enforcement;” although he added in 2004 that “the sheriff’s done a great job cleaning it up in the last two years.” Avon has “lost ten [young men] since 1990, drug overdose, suicide, homicide because of drugs.” A fisherman felt that the drug problem stemmed from youth “losing their culture,” and another resident pointed to a lack of direction and purpose in people’s lives.

You know why they pop pills? These people don’t have anything to do. They don’t wake up like I do. You seen my stove I got out there? When I wake up in the morning, I go in the garage and cook breakfast. I’ll have bacon and eggs and sausage, baked biscuits. I sit there and think of what I’m going to do that day.

Although conceding many of the newcomers to Avon are fine people, especially the retirees who appreciate the slow pace, some residents worry that the culture of the village is eroding. “People are going into Avon and paying a half million dollars for those old houses and tearing them down. They’re putting up places on stilts. Once the old people are gone, it’s over.”



An elderly resident who lived on less than one acre of land cited rising property taxes as an unfortunate part of change. "Our taxes was \$3 dollars and something. This year they're \$341." Another Kinnakeeter who lived near marshland recalled paying \$13 dollars in property tax in 1973, compared to over \$600 dollars today.

Many question if their children or grandchildren will be able to afford to live in Avon given the soaring costs of property. In the past, parents deeded property to their children; the property was not expensive and it was expected that children would make a living in the village. Today parents deed extremely valuable property to their children, but are not sure their descendents will be able to make enough wages to pay property tax.

All my property is turned over to my kids, so when I die all they got to do is step in. It's not like me - when I got married the first time I was making \$125 a month. I had a car, rented an apartment, and bought food. My first wife worked for the telephone company for \$25 a week. We got by. It takes two today to run a house. Their mortgage payment is \$700-\$1,500 a month. Back in them days it didn't cost that much. I remember one wife and I we used to buy chicken backs and necks to make soup out of it just so we could buy a pack of cigarettes.

## 7.5. Buxton

### 7.5.1. Name, Place, and Features

Buxton, six miles south of Avon and just north of Frisco, was listed as "Cape Hatteras Indian Town" on early maps (Figure 7.5.1.). The first post office, established in 1873, served a community simply called "The Cape." The name "Buxton" was chosen in 1882 after Judge Ralph P. Buxton (Crumbley and Ertzberger 1988). The name "Indian Town" came from a population of American Indians that resided or camped at the Cape. East Carolina University archaeologist David Phelps recently found large numbers of European trade items at a site in Buxton, from an Algonkian village thought to be the capital of the Croatan chiefdom (Ward and Davis 1999). The native population encountered at European contact was steadily reduced to poverty. In 1714 the North Carolina Council ordered that the Hatteras Indians be supplied with corn, but the group never recovered. The last reference to Indian inhabitants was in a 1788 deed transferring the "Indian Town" site and more from "Mary Elks, Inden," to "Nathan Midyett" (Stick 1958, 73).

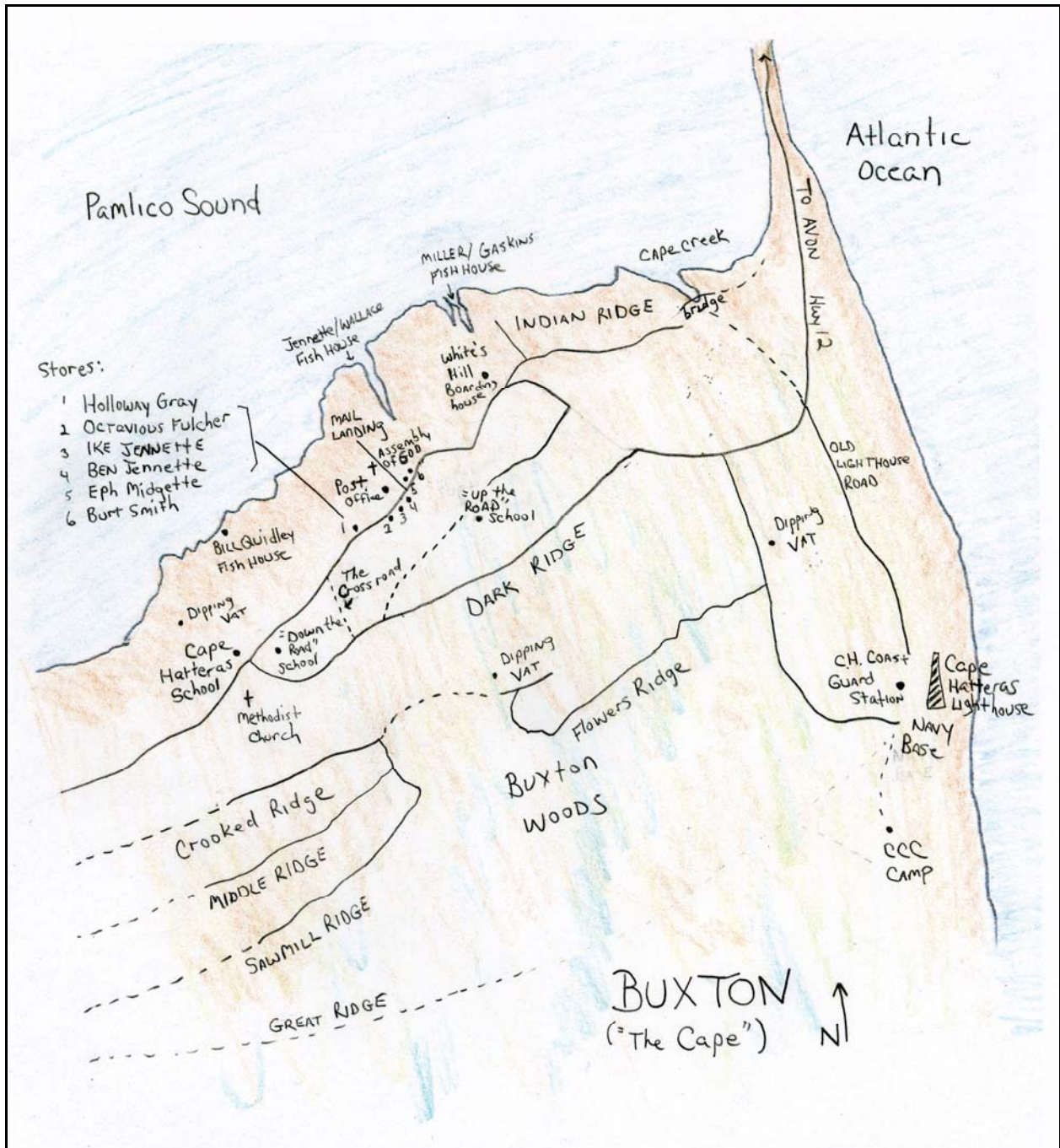


Figure 7.5.1. Satellite Image of Buxton.  
Source: NC Division of Marine Fisheries.

Buxton, located 10 feet above sea level and tucked in the wooded elbow of Cape Hatteras, made the village a desirable place for people to live. Many moved from Avon after various storms and flooding. A villager explained that her house, built in the 1800s in Avon, was moved to Buxton by her parents-in-law when they decided to reside in the secluded village:

They took it down in sections and put it on a boat, smart old codgers. And they come sailing down the sound with it and landed down here. Then they hauled it up here and put it back up. So it's got a little history to it. It's seen some storms. Could tell some tales.

Although its location afforded more protection for villagers, a unique feature of Buxton made it a particularly dangerous area for mariners: the Diamond Shoals. Diamond Shoals juts 25 miles off Cape Hatteras in a three-tiered diamond shape, consisting of Outer Diamond, Inner Diamond, and Hatteras Shoals (Payne 1985). Each shoal is separated by a slough. Diamond Shoals is the prime reason surrounding waters have been called the “Graveyard of the Atlantic,” not only because of the many ships that have run aground and broken up on the shoals, but because it is the point of confluence where the warm Gulf Stream meets the cold Labrador current, the “weather-breeder hatchery” for the east coast. Severe weather systems tend to form off Cape Hatteras and move north (Wechter 1975, 173). Thus, the area was the chosen location for the Cape Hatteras lighthouse, a focal point of Buxton; the area also houses facilities associated with the lighthouse, such as National Park Service offices and a visitor center. The Hatteras Weather Station has also been located at the Cape, as has a Navy base (Map 7.5).



Map 7.5. Buxton Village with Historical Sites (not to scale). Sketch by B. Garrity-Blake.

In addition to its lush stand of woods, prehistoric Indian sites, and Cape Hatteras lighthouse, Buxton is known for being the location of 1902 wireless telegraphy experiments by Thomas Edison's former chief chemist Reginald Fessenden. Fessenden transmitted the first

musical notes received by signal from Buxton to Roanoke Island, successfully sending the first wireless message and foreshadowing the radio (Stick 1958, Wechter 1975). Guide wire anchors are still visible at Fessenden's tower site, and the community has since built a community center named in his honor near the original location.

The sand roads in Buxton were known as "cart roads" and were not "wide enough to pass unless you went in the bushes." They wound throughout Buxton Woods, "trees all the way down." Compared to the long, barren stretch from Avon, travelers must have found great relief reaching the lush woods of Buxton. "The pines would hang out over the road and the sand was so hot, you'd have to run from one shady spot to the other so you wouldn't get your feet burned. The limbs hanging out there made a shady spot." Buxton residents, like many other islanders, used the term "up the road" and "down the road." The former was in the direction toward Avon, while the later was going toward Frisco and Hatteras. Rollinson road, a side avenue off Highway 12, was once a part of the main road.

Buxton was unique in having freshwater ponds where islanders could go ice-skating in the winter and bass fishing in the warmer months. Along the sound shore the water was ideal for swimming, with shallow, sandy shoals. The only muddy place was "right off the heel of a creek." "Doctor's Hole" was a place in the water where "the freight boats had kicked out." A villager recalled saving a girl who had disappeared into that hole:

I was polling the boat in, and three or four girls were going to wade in. This girl, much shorter than the rest of them, got in the hole. They began to scream for me, that Alice wasn't there. So I had to pole back out there to where they were. And I could see the bubbles coming up where she was. I reached right over the side of the boat and pulled her over the washboard of the boat. Water came out, and that's what saved her.

Standard Oil Company dug an exploratory well near the lighthouse in 1946. A channel was dredged “to bring oil well equipment in here because they couldn’t bring it down on the beach. They brought it on barges”:

They had to run an oil line all the way along the edge of the road out to the lighthouse all the way out to that oil well and that’s a long ways. They had two great big diesel engines. They worked night and day. You could hear the engines running from here on a calm night.

The company did not find oil, but did hit a “trace of gas” and unearthed “ancient bugs” fossilized in their core samples.

Villagers recalled few rifts within the community. A woman cited the saying, “Where there’s children and dogs, you’re going to have trouble,” but, she added that to her recollection neighbors got along well and people were generally “kind and easy going.” Her mother “would cook up a big, old pot of stew and the neighbors would all share it like one big family. Honest to goodness, I can’t remember any of them ever having a fuss.” Early family names in Buxton included Miller, Ballance, White, Basnett, Burrus, Gray, Jennette, Quidley, Rollinson, Stowe, Scarborough, Whidbee, Williams, and Barnett.

Bankers grew up in Buxton eating “fish galore,” including the traditional Outer Banks dish of stewed or boiled red drum:

You boil it and boil potatoes. You fry up salt pork and make a gravy. You cut up an onion in that grease. You take your fish and potato on your plate and flake it. Then you take this grease and put over it with black pepper and you have biscuits or fried cornbread and, honey, it’s bad eating; you really got a down homer.

An elderly village reported that they always had dessert with fish. Potato, bread, or pumpkin pudding, rice custard, pies, and cakes were common choices. Another common dinner was fried, stewed, or baked chicken with rice, beans, or greens. So much of their food came from fishing, duck hunting, and farming that villagers did not feel the impact of the Depression

that people did in mainland or big city areas. “We could always rely on fishing and our chickens. We got eggs and meat and a garden - you’d make enough selling some fish to buy flour and margarine.” Neighbors looked after one another during trying times. “Nobody was going hungry,” explained a villager, “because people here don’t let anybody go hungry if they know about it.”

A villager described growing up in Buxton as “primitive” because of no highway or electricity. She said that people fished, crabbed, or went to the beach, and that the lighthouse was the “main thing” the village had to offer. Growing up in the 1930s, she expressed a feeling of isolation due to transportation difficulties and a limited ferry schedule.

Buxton had better water, according to villagers, than other locations because the village was higher and the well water was of good quality:

My mother and grandmother had good water. People had cisterns and caught rainwater for cooking and drinking. You used the well point water for baths, washing cloths. You would soon use up the rainwater. Rodanthe had terrible water. It was awful. People in Frisco mostly depended on rainwater. They had a lot of barrels they would use to catch rainwater. Hatteras had rainwater too until they got electricity.

### **7.5.2. Relation to Other Villages and Beyond**

Many Avon families moved to Buxton after the devastating storms of 1929, 1933, and 1944. This connection has not stopped villagers from teasing Avon residents about their history of making yaupon tea. “We kid the Kinnakeeters, we being from Buxton, and I think everybody does,” said a Buxton man. “We say, Kinnakeeters, highly fed, yaupon tea and crackling bread.” Buxton was described as more of an outgoing village than the more “clannish” village of Avon. Another person interpreted the difference as people having less a sense of community in Buxton than in other places, but that people are still caring to one another when it counts:

Nobody can get together on anything. That's why we never got a boat ramp here, even though we have a harbor. Some of the commissioners didn't support it. But when it comes to looking out for your neighbor, well, nobody goes hungry here. If people think you're having a hard time making ends meet, you'll find them dropping off more groceries than you could ever eat. We do look out for one another like that.

A villager described strangers motoring to Buxton and running aground in the shallow sound waters offshore; the strangers were helped and taken in by islanders.

When you'd hear that foghorn blow and blow, you'd know that somebody couldn't get ashore. Everything was called "landing" then. On the shoreline if they had any operation with a boat, it was called landing. We'd go down and take the landing skiff and pole off to bring them ashore. And we didn't know who they were – they were strangers. We'd invite them up to the house and get acquainted with them.

Bankers were known to leave the village and the island in search of work. A woman moved to Virginia Beach in the 1960s to work at a restaurant, but eventually moved back to Buxton. "[Virginia Beach] was the limelight of my life, like a little Hollywood. [But], when they got liquor by the drink and the Mafia moved in, it was bad and that's when I came home."

### **7.5.3. School**

Before all village schools were consolidated in 1955, Buxton had two schools: the "Up the Road School" in the middle of the village toward Avon, and the "Down the Road School" closer to Frisco. The schools offered grades one through 11. Students could graduate from 12<sup>th</sup> grade elsewhere, or simply "quituate" from the non-credited school. Many Hatteras village students came to the Buxton School for ninth, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Some of the early teachers included Sadie Robertson from Morehead City, Charlie Gray, and a Mr. Wright. A Buxton woman finished the 11<sup>th</sup> grade in the early 1920s and then attended beautician school in New Bern; she said that she always regretted not graduating from high school. Another woman said



that college “wasn’t talked about then, because there wasn’t any money, so I didn’t look forward to it. I looked forward to working and making some money.”

The paved road that linked all the villages of Hatteras Island led to what islanders refer to as “consolidation” in 1955 as the small village schools closed and children were transported to Cape Hatteras School in Buxton. Buxton was chosen because of its central location and relatively protected and woodsy setting. The transition was not problem-free, although it went smoother than some feared. “They had too many pupils when they consolidated,” recalled a resident. “They didn’t get enough teachers and the building wasn’t big enough.” Because of initial overcrowding some Hatteras students carried on the common practice of leaving the island for high school. “Some students went to Manteo and Norfolk to high school.”

A Hatteras man shared a comment made by his grandmother when asked what the most important change to the island was:

She said [the most important change] was the consolidation of the schools, because all the kids got to know each other and started getting along better village to village. The schools consolidated when I was in the fifth grade. We were pretty clear that we were going to have trouble with these other people. That there was going to be fights, problems with the other villagers. I thought that was interesting that my grandmother picked that as the most significant change because it brought the island together.

The consolidation of Hatteras Island schools met with opposition from villagers, but villagers such as Doc Folb viewed it as a change for the better. “There was a lot of rivalry between the different villages, but not as much as it used to be because consolidation helped a whole lot,” (Toth et al. 1973, 49).

The K-12 school began an award-winning journal in the 1973 called *Sea Chest*, for which students interviewed old-timers about fishing methods, traditional healing practices, and other cultural and historical topics. The debut issue, for example, featured an interview with “Doc Folb”, the Navy Pharmacist’s Mate who doctored islanders from Hatteras Village to Rodanthe

(Toth et al. 1973). The journal, started by teachers Mildred Jeranko and Richard Lebovitz, demonstrated the extent to which Hatteras Islanders cared about their cultural heritage and historical roots, and no doubt helped formulate an island identity in addition to a family or village identity. “Armed with tape recorders and cameras, we students opened many doors otherwise destined to stay closed forever as the older generation graciously reflected on the past to us,” recalled former *Sea Chest* editor Danny Couch. “I’ll never forget Dewey Basnett of Trent telling the hilarious story of how the first two cars on the island wrecked the first time they got near each other.”

Cape Hatteras School has served as a meeting place for a variety of non-school communities as well, such as public hearings concerning fisheries, beach management, and development issues.

#### **7.5.4. Church**

Buxton had two churches: the Methodist and the Assembly of God. There was at least one revival a year. “We had a Bible reading every morning before breakfast” said a Methodist church member. Another said that the “homey” feeling has eroded over time with an influx of new people, but she nonetheless appreciated the “modern teachers” and new building. “I think it’s better.”

A man raised in the Assembly of God church on the island saw both good and bad in religious communities:

I’m not what you might call a religious person. Church members will get mad with a preacher and send him away. That’s not very church-like behavior. I’ve seen too much stuff like that, people saying one thing and acting another way. But I’ve been diagnosed with cancer, and the doctors are giving me one month to live. I’ve had several people stop by from the church to tell me they’re going to pray for me. I tell them, well – go ahead if you want to. It can’t hurt.

### **7.5.5. Stores**

As in other villages, people in Buxton depended on small general stores for staple items like flour, sugar, tubs of butter, lard, coffee, canned goods, as well as hardware supplies. Early storekeepers included Burton Smith, Octavius Fulcher, Benjamin Jennette, Eph Midgett, and Holloway Gray. Eph Midgett, Hollowell Gray, and Ike Jennette ran stores around the World War II period. “We went to get our molasses down at Mr. Octavius Fulcher’s store. He used to get this molasses and buy it from the West Indies. And it was heavy; you could cut it with a knife almost.” Isaac Jennette had a store in Buxton as well. “Momma would go there, take the lid off that round wooden barrel, pull out a piece of salt pork and wrap it up in a piece of newspaper.” Salesmen or “drummers” from Elizabeth City stayed at one of two small hotels in Buxton, or at boarding houses such as that run by Maude White or Caddie Gaskins, while taking orders at community stores.

### **7.5.6. Pastimes and Childhood Activities**

Buxton children made do with the materials around them, constructing their own toys and imaginary worlds. A Buxton man remembered having fun as a boy with sand and shards of glass. “I’d get a broken window and I’d break it to get it in the shape of a boat. And I would push that glass around in the sand, and that’s the way I amused myself when I was real small. I was that crazy about boats and I’ve been ever since!” A villager recalled making mud dolls in the early 1930s:

Take and make them, put them on the top of a slab of wood and let them dry out, and then we’d make doll clothes for them. They’d last a pretty good while if we were careful with them. If some part of it broke off, we’d stick it back on with mud.

She remembered swimming in the sound with her family. She said that everyone swam in their clothes, as nobody had bathing suits. “Our parents would go with us, and they’d go in their clothes too. Me and my grandmother would be out there in the water, and she was big, heavy and she’d float. She had to hold onto a pole to keep down.”

Some villagers reported that boys had more free time than girls, as girls were expected to stay close to home, helping with chores and raising the children. “You had to help do everything when you didn’t have hired help, and my people never had hired help. We did the work – we girls did like a lot of girls did in those days; helped their mother with the younger children.”

Just getting around was fun for children. “My brother had a goat, and Daddy made him a cart and a harness, and hitched it up to that and we’d take rides.” Teenagers at the Cape, as in other villages, enjoyed big gatherings where they would cook candy, fudge, or stews. They went out to the beach on moonlit nights or go to each other’s houses. They also had square dances to an old Victrola, which “was more fun than a barrel of monkeys.” They traveled to Hatteras to attend dances at the Pavilion and later the Beacon or Tandies, where they could buy beer at eighteen. Buxton residents enjoyed plays or movies at the schoolhouse. A villager recalled a man from Wanchese who showed movies in Buxton once a month. Many families imposed a curfew, however, on children and teens.

There was a curfew, and you were home at 9 o’clock nights. That’s how we were brought up. You went to visit your classmates in the evening, but you were home early. We ate supper earlier, like at 4:30 or 5:00, because there were no lights except lamps. We tried to eat before we had to light lamps because it was more convenient to get the kitchen cleaned up.

Sometimes women threw “basket parties” to raise money for needs such as a church function. Villagers brought hand-woven baskets or cakes to be raffled. “If you took a cake or basket, why, your boyfriend was supposed to buy it whether he wanted to or not.”

As in other villages, “visiting” was a favorite pastime, including visits from relatives who moved off-island for work but returned home occasionally. “People moved away, but they always came back to see their relatives,” said a 75 year-old resident. “Years ago it was so much fun to see them and have them for dinner.”

They always ate. People had bigger appetites. It was fried chicken or stewed chicken with pastry, chicken and dumplings, and collard greens, potato salad, and boiled ham when company was coming. We ate a lot of seafood and fowl; trout out of the sound, flounder, and sea mullet.

### **7.5.7. Medical Care**

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Buxton had an outbreak of typhoid fever. Tuberculosis was a problem as well. A woman recalled her husband receiving “the cure” in the 1940s, living in State Sanatorium in Wilson, North Carolina for four years. Her small daughter visited her father, “and saw her dad on the ground from the windows. He was on the second floor.” No one else in the family became tubercular, which she attributed to careful sanitation.

Our mother taught us cleanliness, and it makes a difference. Our blankets were washed, and bedspreads and mattresses – everything was cleaned with Rinso and Clorox and aired. Evidently, he didn’t take care of himself because no one else in his family got TB. I think it was the life he lived, exposure.

Buxton women had the choice of midwives or nearby doctors for childbirth. Midwives, unlike doctors, could not administer ether or other pain relievers, and could not examine a mother “internally” but were often considered better than physicians. “We had this midwife,” recalled a villager. “Mrs. Rovena Quidley, and she was just precious. She just delivered loads of babies” including one at the lighthouse keeper’s house. Other Buxton midwives included Cynthia Rollinson and Laura Williams. Midwives took care of minor illnesses as well, such as the flu or croup.

The Naval Station in Buxton commissioned a physician who served islanders as well as military and Coast Guard personnel. Doctors, according to a villager, “didn’t stay very long. You had a doctor for a couple of years and then he was gone.” Early doctors in Buxton included Dr. Davis, Dr. Kenfield, and Dr. Eppler. Dr. Eppler was a female physician who refused to deliver babies:

She would not take a maternity case. She said, “Now, I can’t attend you. I can’t deliver your child but I’ll tell Miss Quidley what to do, but I can’t be there.” No one ever knew why she wouldn’t. Could have been something that happened some time back, and it just bothered her.

In the 1920s, the island’s beloved Maurice Bernard “Doc” Folb served as Chief Pharmacist’s Mate for the U.S. Navy, working out of the radio station in Buxton for over six years. His predecessor had died in the flu epidemic of 1919. Not only did Folb serve eight Coast Guard stations and five lighthouses; he also delivered babies (often helping midwife Rovenia Quidley) and tended illnesses from Hatteras Village to Rodanthe. “I couldn’t have done it if the Coast Guard hadn’t helped to pull me out of swamps, push me, get me out of bad places,” Folb said (Toth et al. 1973, 49). Folb and a nurse “set up nursing schools in every village and taught people to do emergency work.” Folb, like all islanders, learned to “make do” with the materials at hand. “Had one boy in Kinnakeet who broke his leg playing baseball. I was there without any tools, but they were building a house next door and I took a shingle and wrapped it in cotton and made a splint for him,” Folb recalled (Toth et al. 1973, 48). “We used to have special first aid lockers in every village,” he reported (Toth et al. 1973, 44). He witnessed tuberculosis outbreaks, typhus fever, and diphtheria. “[Diphtheria] started in Hatteras and then went to Frisco and Buxton...I used up a million units of antitoxin” (Toth et al. 1973, 48). Folb described a fatal case of diphtheria.

The diphtheria gives of a germ; you can pull the heart muscle apart if you do an autopsy. I took one look at the child and wouldn't touch it. I sent for a Navy ambulance and doctor. We looked at the little girl. She couldn't lie down. Her eyes were popping out of her head. I took out the antitoxin and gave it to [the Navy doctor]. He said, "Honey, I am going to give you a shot," and when she turned she fell over dead (Toth 1973, 50)

Cancer seems all too common in Outer Banks villages, including Buxton. Patients leave the island for grueling chemotherapy or radiation, usually in Elizabeth City. A fisherman, now deceased, reflected on his illness:

They gave me four months to live unless I treated the brain cancer. That's not very long. I went ahead with the surgery, and chemo. That was six months ago. They told me yesterday it's in my bones and to take care of anything I need to take care of, I probably have a month to live. Doctor asked me if I was afraid, and I said no. I'm not afraid to die. I've lived my life. Just sold my boat, since I'll have no need for that. Kind of hated to see that go, I've had her so long.

#### **7.5.8. Early Transportation**

Before the advent of cars and buses, islanders traveled across land via horse and cart. A villager described "flat carts" that allowed one to sit on the edge with "your feet dangled down between the shaft and the horse," that is, along the front edge of the cart where the horse's harness attached. Men ordered the wheels and axles, but built the carts. The wheels were wooden with a "flat metal rim" around the outside. Buxton families rode in the flat carts to church or down to Frisco or Hatteras: "The roads were so salty. But that's the transportation we had, and it was nice."

Bankers also rode horses bareback after catching them on the beach. A villager recalled when she and her brother were sent after one of her father's mares. They approached "Mary" with bridle in hand, but the mare was in heat and a stallion challenged the children:

We were both going to ride her bareback. But here come this old stallion. He'd rare up on his hind legs and scream. Honey, that was two scared kids. You talking about somebody praying. We'd get on one side and when he'd come at us, we'd go on the opposite side. We kept inching along until he ran back to his brood. We'd be a-crying

telling Dad about it. He said, “Well, next time I’ll give you a gig and gig him like that. And, very calmly, mother said, “No, Jim, there won’t be a next time.”

In the 1920s travel to distant points involved switching to different sources of transportation. A villager described a family trip to visit relatives in Wilmington, Delaware. First they spent the day getting to Manteo by car and boat. They spent the night at the Tranquil House, and took a boat to Elizabeth City. From there they boarded a train to Baltimore, and then boarded a passenger boat to Delaware.

Starting in the 1930s villagers in Buxton took advantage of the Midgett brother’s Manteo-Hatteras Bus Line, riding to Manteo where they could pick up a bus to Norfolk or Elizabeth City. “When they took Greyhound out of Manteo that was a shame,” said a villager. “But they had to – there wasn’t enough patrons. People started buying cars when they got more jobs and more money, more tourists.”

### **7.5.9. Early Communication**

Fishermen in the early part of the century rigged a makeshift phone line from Buxton Village through the forest, over the dunes, to a Cape Point fish dealer. “They’d walk over and use that telephone to ring over and tell Burton Smith, who had a little store there in Buxton, that they had a load of fish, and he would send horse and carts out to the people to bring the fish over for them” (Baum et al.1976-77, 46). Once the fish (typically gray trout) were carted to the village, they were iced and sailed to Hatteras Village where they were loaded on larger sailing vessels for markets in Elizabeth City or Washington, D.C. “They also had a flag they raised to keep [the boats] from having to come all the way in...if they had no ice...in warning to them that there was no need of coming on down because they couldn’t handle the fish” (Baum et al.1976-77, 46).



### **7.5.10. Postal Service**

When Pharaoh Scarborough became postmaster of the new mail facility in 1873, the village retained "The Cape" as its name. But nine years later the name Buxton was adopted. The post office was located near a cut where a shove skiff would go out to meet the mail boat. An early 20<sup>th</sup> century postmaster was Maude White, called affectionately the "mayor of Buxton." This was because of her familiarity with everyone through the post office and a sizeable boarding house that she ran.

As the mail boat could not navigate the shallow sound waters to the shore, it would pause offshore at the lead while mail and passengers got loaded into a small shove skiff that met the boat. "They used to say, "tin cent" please," recalled "Doc" Folb of Buxton, referring to the pronunciation of "ten." "Every village had a little skiff and would pole out to meet you, to pick up passengers and freight, then pole them to shore and pay them 'tin' cents" (Toth et al. 1973, 48-49).

### **7.5.11. Early Trade**

Buxton old-timers described a mill, and, at one time, a cornfield on the sound side of town. Corn was also brought in from the mainland, and after the mills were closed, corn meal. A man recalled when the old mill collapsed, and the two millstones landed in the sound. "We used to have to watch for those stones and not get the boat onto them. If the tide was low, you could see them out there."

Before tourism took hold on Hatteras Island, residents struggled to make ends meet, especially when commercial fishing was depressed. Like Frisco villagers, Buxton residents were dependant on firewood from Buxton Woods, both for household use and to sell to others. "We

used a wood burning stove, a box stove they called them,” recalled a man. Boat builders in Buxton included Bill Quidley, who built sail skiffs and shove skiffs, and Rocky Rollinson, who “hewed ribs from trees and steamed them,” building boats such as the *Odessa* and the *Lucille* when he was not fishing commercially.

In the late 1950s early 1960s tourism existed, but there were too few hotels and restaurants to provide substantial employment. A villager described how he traveled all the way to Oregon Inlet each day in order to make a living.

In 1962 I went to work on a state ferry at a dollar an hour. We’d ride with each other. A dollar an hour wasn’t stretching too far so I had to go back on the pilot boat. Jobs were scarce. You either went off in the military or in the Merchant Marines – some of the men stayed and managed to make it fishing but the bulk of them had to leave home.

#### **7.5.12. Commercial Fishing**

Buxton was more important as an informal county seat rather than as a fishing village, according to geographer Gary Dunbar, but fishing was always part of village life (Dunbar 1956). Buxton had an offshore fish house in Pamlico Sound, called the “ice house,” where fish were offloaded to an Elizabeth City-bound buy boat. Hayes Farrow of Buxton captained one of the buy boats. Fishermen attempted to organize a co-op once the highway was paved and ice was easily had. They paid dues, and planned to purchase trucks, but “it didn’t work. Too many of the ones who were going to help didn’t help – it just fell apart.” A small fish house operated out of the White’s boarding house, run by the Miller and Gaskins families. Other fish houses included those run by Bill Quidley, Taylor Quidley, and W. Snowden Quidley. Most contemporary fishermen living in Buxton keep their vessels in Hatteras village for easy access to the inlet and ocean (Figure 7.5.2.).



Figure 7.5.2. Fishing Vessel *Lucy B.* with Drop Net Rig.  
Photo by Danielle Waples.

Commercial fishing is a dangerous enterprise, particularly off the Outer Banks where the weather can be so capricious. A fisherman in Buxton described how he lost his thumb while working in Pamlico Sound, illustrating the perilous nature of his occupation:

Our engine broke down. A feller came up in his boat and threw us a line so he could tow us in. It was blowing so bad we had trouble catching the line and tying up. The line somehow got hooked over his throttle, and yanked it down so his boat jumped forward. I had my hand on the false staff (a towing bit at the forward of a boat for attaching a tow line to) on my boat, with the line around it. When his boat jumped ahead, the line snapped tight against my hand, and my thumb popped right off. It shot in the air about four feet and landed right between my feet!

“My grandfather used to say ‘get ready to take a strain,’” reported a villager, underscoring how hard the work was on a fishing boat.

In recent years, few fishermen encouraged their children to follow in their footsteps, as they foresaw little opportunity for financial success in this industry for them. They point to their dwindling numbers and cite the growing number of restrictions as a primary cause. “We used to launch our dories wherever the fish were, and now it’s got to be in a designated zone because sport fishermen are there, tourists are over here, sea turtles are there.” Some were especially

discouraged over the Cape Point controversy that raged in the early 1990s as sport fishermen sought to restrict commercial fishermen from a coveted fishing spot.

It got especially bad at Cape Point where fishing is the best. I remember getting ready to set my net, and there was a fella standing there in hip waders with rod and reel. He said, "You'll probably catch a lot of fish with that net today." I said, "I hope so!" And then he just went on me, starting blessing me out. It got so bad I told my boy, "You better find a different way to make a living."

The conflict with recreational anglers is felt more along the seashore near Buxton than in other areas, as the Cape has long been a premier location for surf fishermen.

A Buxton fisherman even gave up his coveted pound net permit rather than pass it to his son. Pound net sets are allotted by the state by special permit, and some fishermen hold areas that have been in their family for generations. Some sets "catch better" than others, depending on proximity to a slough, inlet, and so on. The Buxton fisherman, dying of cancer, said that his son wanted his pound set, but he refused. "I gave it up," he explained, letting it revert back to the state:

I told him he didn't need to get into this mess. Said, you're doing fine with what you're doing now. He's got a heating and air conditioning business, and built that house back there to rent. He's only in his forties, and he's making a good way for himself.

### **7.5.13. Hunting**

A lighthouse keeper's family had an interesting way of getting shorebirds for supper.

On stormy nights, beach birds would hit the light. Daddy would call down next morning and he'd say, "Bring me a bucket," and get buckets for the birds. They make the nicest pot pies, you know. Our mothers would cook them up. They were good, too.

"White's Hill" was a hunting club and tourist home run by a prominent Buxton family, the White's. They offered employment to some Buxton residents, not only as hunting guides but

also as housekeepers and cooks. “My mother would go up there and work for them, cook breakfasts,” recalled a villager.

#### **7.5.14. Livestock and Gardening**

Bankers in Buxton typically had cows, and were rarely without milk between their own supply and the habit of sharing with neighbors. “Rany’s father had a cow and if she had a calf first, why, they would give us milk. Then when our cow had one, we’d give them some.” A man born in 1906 recalled his wife selling milk for ten cents a quart. He said that Buxton children “were all raised from the cows,” and that he fed about a dozen cattle, some “that I hadn’t raised but that came up for food. They run at large.” Livestock feed, supplementing the animals’ diet of natural island vegetation, was mail-ordered.

Herds of cattle were called “gangs” by islanders, and residents at the Cape recognized distinct groupings: the wild gang was comprised of cattle “raised in the woods and swamps and loaded with fat the year round,” behaving “as wild as any deer in the woods.” The shore side gang was made up of cows more “tame, and when you’d drive them they were slow.” Finally there was a gang of 20 or 30 running at large between Buxton and Avon.

Buxton Woods was a favorite hideout for free-ranging goats, earning villagers the nickname “Goaters.” “We’d call them Goaters and, man, you could get in a fight in a hurry over calling them a Goater,” laughed a Hatteras villager.

The state began requiring all livestock to be dipped every two weeks during the summer to reduce disease-carrying fleas and ticks. This effort was part of the “cattle tick war” led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture between 1921 and 1926. In Buxton, a group of eight to 12 riders

would leave before daylight down Davis road, which was a path that jutted off the main road to the beach.

We had to go before daylight because the wild gang would sleep out along the surf, on the beach, to get clear of the mosquitoes and the flies. They would be down at the water's edge, lying there asleep. If they didn't hear the riders, they'd get the smell, the same as a deer. They'd head for the woods to get in the swamps. We had to keep them down on the surf by the lighthouse up to where our vat was in the edge of the woods.

Blocked by the riders, cattle would sometimes head into the ocean through the surf and stand waiting on a sandbar. Once, three cows were herded off a sandbar by Charlie Rollinson, Eddie Midgett, and C. Ruffman Gray, riding a "nice stall-fed horse of my grandfather's." Two cows got away and one lay at the foot of a dune. "We had to draw straws to see who would go over the top of the hill. I chose the straw," said Gray. While his companions watched from their horses, he crept over the hill on foot to scare the cow:

That buffalo cow saw me. She didn't do a thing but take after me! I had to run around the hill to get to my horse. She was so close, I could feel her breath and couldn't get on my horse. I had to go around the hill a second time! Them other two riders were in their saddle dying laughing! Just set right there and laughed at me. And we lost all three.

Some livestock was sold to mainlanders who sailed 30 miles to the Cape and loaded their newly purchased cattle on boats.

Villagers also had hog killings for meat, "chitlins" (chitterlings), and lard. A man named Jesse Foster was considered one of the experts in hog killing and was called to assist villagers:

He didn't shoot them. He hit them in the head and they'd fall back. After they died, they'd stick them to let the blood out. You'd have a barrel with boiling water sitting on a kind of angle, and after they died, slide them down into that barrel and roll them over in that. That would loosen the hair on to them. They'd come out just as pretty and hairless. Then they'd cut the hams and the shoulders and start the ribs. The women would make sausage, chitlins.

Gardens in Buxton yielded a bit more produce than other Hatteras Island locations because of its wooded lushness and close proximity to the Gulf Stream. Beans, cabbage,

collards, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, tomatoes, and cucumbers were some of the vegetables grown. A resident said that the sandy soil was especially good for potatoes. “I decided that after I dug my sweet potatoes, I would take a couple of them and weigh them. And those two sweet potatoes weighted eight pounds, 13 ounces when I put them on the scale! They wasn’t good for baking – you could slice them and fry them.”

Gardeners ordered seed and sweet potato sprouts through the mail; they would arrive by mail boat via Manteo. A villager said that most sought after sweet potato was called “Puerto Rico yams.” “Woods mold,” or a mulch of dead leaves, pine straw, and “rind” or tree bark was used to fertilize gardens. Woods mold was collected amid the pines, oaks, and hollies of Buxton Woods.

Buxton residents collected wild black grapes that grew near the present-day National Park Service cabins. A sand hill stretched from Park Service property to Creed’s Hill, and back behind the grasses and bushes were holly trees heavy with grape vines. Villagers made jams and preserves from the grapes, as well as from blackberries growing between Buxton and Rodanthe “in the woods near the shore.” Villagers also had fig, apple, and peach trees. “I had a lime tree,” said a villager. “And, I knew a fella who had a couple of nice orange trees. But it gets too cold in the winter.” A particularly large grapefruit tree lost more than 100 green grapefruits during a “crazy, freak hurricane” of September, 1949. By far, fig trees were the most important and readily grown fruit, while citrus was “introduced...as proof to tourists of the mildness of the climate” (Dunbar 1956, 133).

#### **7.5.15. Perceptions of Environment and Storms**

Before the weather service began naming hurricanes in the 1950s, people remembered storms by the year they hit. A woman from Buxton explained that islanders did not even use the

word “hurricane.” “We didn’t know about tornados and hurricanes. It was either a bad northwester or southwester or something like that.” No matter what the name, she loved storms:

I guess it’s the savage in me. It’s unbelievable that something like that could just boil up so quickly. I’d tell my husband, “Come on honey, we’ve got to go to the beach. He’d fuss and fume, say, “We’re going to get in trouble sometime.” We’d go stand on those dunes and watch that ocean come boiling in and the wind blowing like mad.

She never feared the storms, and recalled her father saying, “never be afraid unless you see me afraid.” “If he was afraid,” she added, “he wasn’t going to show it. We just thought, well, if my Dad can take it, I can take it.”

A Buxton man supported the dune-building project, begun in earnest after the 1933 storm, but later observed that the dunes accelerated erosion. “When we had a flat beach, the prevailing wind in the summer is hard southwest, moving sands from the south beach to the north beach. Winter it’s the opposite. Nature’s balancing act. Now the dunes block it.” An old-timer remembered when Buxton had more forested area. “It’s been all cut out and developed now. It’s a shame because now we get tide – cutting trees causes the tide to come over.”

People living on the Cape so famous for “making weather” are keenly aware of hurricanes and storms. In fact, the nor’easters that can develop “in as little as 12 hours and churn up waves large enough to over-wash...the only road to the mainland” pose as much if not more a threat to island residents (DeBlieu 1998, 5).

Cape dwellers long learned to read the signs of an impending storm. The thrust of the Cape out into the ocean is such that a passing wave may “register...with a crack like a shot of a pistol” and the “sound of the surf pounding the shore north or west of the Cape...has a significance that is bred into an Islander. For them the sea always telegraphs her punches” (MacNeill 1958, 119).



### 7.5.16. Significant Places

The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse was significant to many Buxton residents. An elderly villager recalled when her father was the assistant keeper, and her family resided in a portion of the keeper's quarters.

That little room upstairs, my sister and I had that for our bedroom. We'd take the screen out of the window nights and lay there and watch the rays. We used to have these old, lovely rays that go from the tower, the light. Just light everything up.

Between the lighthouse and the ocean was a ballpark and diamond, where those from all over the island gathered for games. After World War II, villagers gathered at the baseball diamond for games between a team of locals from Buxton, Hatteras, and Avon and a team of servicemen in the Navy. People had picnics there as well, and horse races. "Mr. Guthrie Midgett had a racing mare with a cart. And John Gray had a regular pony that used to run on the beach. They used to have trot races."

A villager recalled visiting the site of a former lighthouse that she called Old Tower Hill.

At this hill was a "dripping stone," which was likely a small spring:

It was known as the dripping stone. I have been dismayed that they ever destroyed that. Under this rock, it formed a little tit-like thing, and that would drop at regular intervals down on this rock underneath of it. Clear water would come out of that rock somewhere. Kids told us if we got any water on our fingers it would turn to stone. So, I stuck my finger in there and let it get good and wet. I didn't sleep much that night. Every time I'd wake up I'd wiggle this finger!

Family land is as important to Buxton villagers as other islanders, and many live in adjoining family lots. A resident looked out his front door and explained his kin-shared compound:

This was a family enclave, literally, right here. My folk's house was where my brother is living right directly in front. My cousin lives right next door to him where the grandparent's house was. The house he was born in is directly across the road from that, and an uncle's house was right next to that across the road over there.

The importance islanders attach to family gravesites is especially apparent in Buxton due to a recent controversy concerning the development of a wooded lot on Flowers Ridge road that had a small cemetery within its borders. The new owner, from off-island, cleared the trees and made room for a large trailer. In doing so the crew unearthed some clearly marked graves, exposing a skull and gaining the outrage of locals (Figure 7.5.3).



Figure 7.5.3. Graves on Edge of Cleared Lot, Buxton. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

#### **7.5.17. Rituals and Community Events**

Christmas during the pre-World War II period seemed to center more around food than gifts. Families would make a spread of two meats instead of the typical one, such as chicken and beef or chicken and roast pork. They also had vegetables such as baked sweet potatoes, greens, fruit from gift baskets, and a huge array of dessert stored in the unheated upstairs.

Dad would get a plank and mother would put a white cloth over it and put it across two chairs upstairs in the big bedroom. That was piled up with pies for the holidays and puddings. I declare, I don't know how the food kept without refrigeration. We didn't have any trouble with it.

Presents included fruit and nuts that were placed in Christmas stockings, clothes, and perhaps a doll or toy. "I never felt like we were cheated," said a villager. "I always felt like we were blessed at Christmas and remembered by family and friends."

Weddings were simple in Buxton, as many opted to marry in the parsonage or at home with family in attendance. "There was just cake, lemonade, or punch" at receptions. A resident said that many weddings occurred at seven or eight in the evening, and few went on a honeymoon.

#### **7.5.18. National Park Service**

Villagers at "the Cape" have had relatively intense contact with park personnel given the high profile of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and associated lands. Buxton villagers as well as people from other island communities were especially engaged during two major events in the past decade: the moving of the lighthouse, and the user-conflict at Cape Point fishing grounds.

Many residents were adamantly opposed to moving the 208-foot Hatteras Light 2,900-feet from its original site in June of 1999; although the federal government feared the light would soon tumble into the ocean, islanders wanted it to stay put. Some thought the move too risky for the aged structure, and felt it best to leave "well enough alone." Others had oriented themselves according to the lighthouse and did not like their important landmark moved. "It's not the same with it moved because it changed all my locations," said a resident. "I used to navigate by that out in the sound." A Hatteras villager recalled how tourists oblivious to the lighthouse would test his grandfather's patience:

When they first paved the road we'd sit on his front porch and people would get lost. They'd be looking for the Cape Hatteras lighthouse. My grandfather, I'd see him wrinkle up his face and say, "You drove all the way down and you didn't see the Cape Hatteras lighthouse up there in Buxton? Do you know that lighthouse marks some of the most dangerous shoals in the world?" I'd say oh Papa please be nice to these people. And he'd say, "They coulda run aground and killed theirself," and I'd say, Papa that's a car; that's a Studebaker!

The relocation was also symbolic of villagers' own tenuous hold on their island and culture. "There's a saying I've always heard around here," said a Buxton resident, referring to the resiliency of the Outer Banker. "The lighthouse is cracked all the way down but it's still standing."

People are fatalists here – that's why they were at terrible odds with the Park Service, that's why they did *not* want that lighthouse moved. It's an act of God, if God wants that lighthouse to move, you know, God'll move it. It was even deeper than that, now I'm speaking for them, okay? I'm dredging their heart for you. And, nobody knows if I'm right or wrong. It was like, if you move the lighthouse, are you going to make us move next? It was a real deep nerve.

In the early 1990s recreational surf fishermen increasingly complained about commercial dory crews that would show up in the winter and net large schools of bluefish. Both the National Park Service and the state Division of Marine Fisheries worked to arbitrate the conflict. Former park superintendent, Tom Hartman, characterized the problem as one of culture and symbolism: seine netters represented a "visual irritation" to anglers (West and Garrity-Blake 2003, 65).

After a series of heated meetings, the dorymen agreed not to fish within a half-mile radius of the tip of the point (Figure 7.5.4). Many were left with a bitter sense of betrayal, however, as expressed by this fisherman:

The Park Service has gone against their own agreement. They got it written down on paper, that they would run the park but not interfere with the local people's ability to make a living. Then they come back and say, "Rules are made to be changed." Well, I don't like that.

He went on to propose that the Park Service was biased toward the sector that frequented National Seashore beaches, campgrounds, historic sites, and interpretive displays: visitors. “The Park Service caters to the tourists – they bring them in, give them speeches on the environment, the history – so they’re always going to go along with the tourists.” He considered commercial fishing and other present-day activities stemming from the traditions of Banker life to be important cultural resources that the National Park Service should promote and explain to visitors. Like many islanders, this fisherman agreed that the establishment of the Park prevented wall-to-wall development a la Nags Head, but added, “We’ve also lost a lot of freedom.”



Figure 7.5.4. Sportsmen’s Off-Road Vehicles Lined up at Cape Point.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

### **7.5.19. Coast Guard and the Military**

Until the Coast Guard took over the lighthouses in 1939, three lighthouse keepers tended the Cape Hatteras Light. They lit the lamp half hour before sunset, and made sure it stayed lit

throughout the night. The 1933 storm destroyed a steel-piling jetty that was built in front of the lighthouse only three years before. The daughter of one of the keepers recalled when the three men were enlisted to paint the spirals after the hired painter left the job unfinished, and her father led the effort:

I don't recall whether it was the white paint they spilled on the black or vice versa. So my Dad volunteered to paint it. I can see him now. They fixed this box and they got on it from the top of the tower. They lowered him down. They kept lowering him till they got all that painted out. He had a cheering mob on the ground. We were all out there. He was a whistling and carrying on himself.

On an especially stormy night when her father was having trouble keeping the light on; her mother realized he had forgotten his lantern and sent the daughter to deliver it:

She bundled me up and gave me the lantern and extra matches, and I had to almost bend double to walk against the wind. But I got up there and he was so glad. On the way, we both heard a cat meow, and we searched that tower over and never did find that cat. My Daddy was not a superstitious person and he said he couldn't account for it unless it was just on the ledge and blew off after it meowed. We never did find him.

Lighthouse keepers were "as much farmers as keepers of the light – they had vegetable gardens, chickens, hogs, milk cows," said the granddaughter of a keeper. They fertilized their gardens with scrap fish like fatback (menhaden) and flounder. "We did not eat flounder." They would also "grub up" with store-bought provisions once a month. She recalled three families of keepers that lived near the station; they had a "summer kitchen" separate from the house and used a New Perfection kerosene stove. When the Cape Hatteras light was rebuilt, materials were carried by barge to Cape Creek or Back Landing Creek on the north soundside of Buxton.

Thirteen miles off the tip of Cape Hatteras was the Diamond Shoals lightship. In 1918, at the height of World War I, a German submarine torpedoed activity the lightship. Walter Barnett was Captain at the time. The lightship was still in commission in the mid 1950s (Stick 1952).

The Cape Hatteras Lifesaving Station was established in 1883, and became the U.S. Coast Guard Cape Hatteras Station #183 in 1915. The 1921 foundering of the “ghost ship,” the *Carroll A. Deering*, was one of the most highly profiled wrecks experienced by this station. The crew spotted the five-masted schooner, sails set, on the outer Diamond shoal; station keeper Baxter Miller was only able to get his crew within five hundred yards of the ship due to rough seas and weather. A 205-foot Coast Guard cutter was able to reach the *Deering* four days later, and the crew found the vessel abandoned save for three cats and a fully prepared meal of pea soup, spareribs, and coffee (Simpson 2002). The whereabouts of the *Deering*’s crew remained a mystery: did they board their lifeboat and drown? Were they victims of piracy? Christopher Columbus Gray of Buxton claimed to have found a bottle with a note from the *Deering* that indicated piracy. The note was later determined to be a fraud; Gray, a fisherman, confessed to writing it in order to make station #183 look bad. He had hoped someone would be fired and a Coast Guard job would open up for him (Simpson 2002).

A villager working at the station in the 1930s after it had become the Cape Hatteras Coast Guard station (#183) described a grueling training program. “We had to turn the boats over out to sea, ride them back, and then do it again. Done that 21 times in one day: 11 at sea, and 10 on the inside, which was Pamlico Sound.” He participated in the last rescue before the Cape Hatteras station was washed away, rescuing eight men from a three-masted sail vessel seven miles down the beach. They pulled a service cart, formerly rigged for horses, with a truck. “We just put the shafts up on the back of the truck and pulled it down the beach at low tide,” he explained. “When we turned it abreast of the wreck, those two shafts come out of the truck right into the sand – over came everything, equipment and all, right on the beach. But the sea had

slowed down and they weren't in danger." Although they had a mishap in using equipment rigged for horses, the truck proved helpful in the end:

We got five of them ashore in the breaches buoy. The line got so slack from pulling them in, we were afraid that something was going to happen. We decided to try something else. We used the pickup truck. Backed it down, and took a tire out with a trailer hitch onto it. And we let that truck do the pulling. Take the strain out, because we were holding on the lines. When we got them through the highest breakers, we began pulling them through the breakers. We got them all to shore safe.

"Doc" Folb of Buxton explained to Cape Hatteras students how the Coast Guard beach patrol worked. The stations were about six to eight miles apart, and a surfman would "leave at sundown till midnight" heading for the neighboring station. He and another surfman would meet half way and exchange tokens to prove that they completed the full patrol (Toth et al. 1973, 46).

After the devastating 1933 storm, the Civilian Conservation Corps set up camp just south of the lighthouse in Buxton to establish a dune line and build up the beach. They cut brush from downed trees and piled it on the beach along their sand fences to trap sand. A retired Army officer named Byrum was in charge, and according to islanders the corpsmen wore Army uniforms and drove military vehicles in carrying out duties of sand fence-building and grass-planting.

World War II brought "dread and fear" to the area according to a Buxton native, as "they could so easily have bombed us – the subs were out here in the ocean. They could knock the light out or the radio station so we couldn't get messages out." The Coast Guard towed Army Cavalry horses to Hatteras Island on barges for patrol duty. "That was the last time the Army Cavalry horses were ever used for anything." The war also brought excitement, especially for young boys, as until then "there was nothing happening – it was like a tropical island. We were swimming every day and didn't wear no clothes."

When a small Navy base was built in Buxton, incoming recruits replenished the



dwindling supply of eligible bachelors who were leaving the island in the late 1950s early 1960s in pursuit of jobs. “The young girls married Coast Guard or Navy boys and then *they* left the island. There was nothing here for them.”

The Cape Hatteras Weather Station was re-located back to Buxton from Hatteras village in 1956. Although it was eventually moved back to Hatteras, the Cape was a logical location given the active weather systems that were spawned off Diamond Shoals. “The climate of Cape Hatteras is fine,” said a station meteorologist. “But, the weather is something to give a man ulcers” (Wechter 1975, 174).

#### **7.5.20. Political Life**

A Democratic party leader from Buxton famously wrote a congressman in 1898 complaining that “the backbone of the Republican Party here are yaupon-choppers, mullet gillers, beach combers – and it is no wonder they are political floaters – a large percent of them are up ‘for value received’” (Dunbar 1956, 102).

Buxton has long served as the informal county seat for Hatteras Island. Although the official county seat is in Manteo, it was a half to full day’s journey away before the Oregon Inlet Bridge was built in 1963. Buxton houses satellite county offices and serves as the educational center of the island; thus the village wields a certain political clout. However, some villagers report less of a sense of community in Buxton than, say, Hatteras, and believe their political influence would be stronger with more consensus. “Nobody can get together on anything,” said a fisherman. “That’s why we never got a boat ramp here, even though we have a harbor.” The importance of Lifesaving Station jobs also compelled some political maneuvering in the early

history of Buxton: men voted for particular station keepers as a means of securing or keeping their positions (Wechter 1975).

### **7.5.21. Modernity and Perceptions of Change**

An elderly Buxton resident was asked how life on Hatteras Island has changed. “You’d have to put on another reel for me to tell you,” she replied. “There’s been that much change here.” She added, “I sometimes wonder if it’s for the best. I think we’re getting too many for the size of the island. But if they want to come live here, well, that’s certainly their privilege.”

A villager felt that “young people don’t respect the older people,” as they did in the past. “We were brought up to be more thankful, and sharing and caring,” she said. “Everybody knew everybody, and you liked everybody.”

A woman who spent many years cooking in restaurants does not frequent them herself in recent years, as eating out has become cost prohibitive. “Everything is expensive,” she declared, including property taxes and flood insurance.

It’s getting to be where hardly anybody can afford to live here now. They’ve gone up extremely high on rent and even trailers. It’s just astronomical fees people are charging. I think it’s a shame, because the young people, I don’t know they manage. I think they’ve had to go back to two and three families living together. You don’t make that kind of money here, when rent is \$600, \$700, \$800 and \$900 a month.

On the other hand, she pointed out a much-improved outlook for young people regarding job opportunities:

There’s 100% advantages for [young people] today. They’re much better off, and they have more opportunities. It’s just astronomical the scholarships that are presented, and I’m so glad for them because there wasn’t any money when I grew up. There were only a few that got to go to college. I’ve talked with other people that I’ve met, and they say that was the same way with their towns.

Tourism has increased dramatically, and according to a Buxton resident, the quality of tourist has changed as well, for the better. “Nice families come surfing today, but in the beginning it was beach bums, hippies. They just wrecked houses and stole. They would sleep on the beach and go sneak under the houses that were rented.”

Although Bankers worry that every inch of land within the villages is getting sold and developed, some residents have profited from the real estate boom. A villager who had inherited several acres from his father and was selling it lot by lot compared the price difference in 1992 to 2002. In 1992 he was selling an acre for \$30 to \$40 thousand dollars. In 2002 an acre in the same area was fetching \$100 to \$150 thousand dollars.

All in all, islanders appreciate the conveniences of modern life, but miss the slow pace and informality that marked their lives before the highway, bridge, and incoming hoards of people. A Buxton man reflected on the very different sense of time and space islanders had:

My ancestors...had three major times they centered their lives around – the rising sun, the sun directly overhead, and the setting sun. Really, there wasn’t much need for a clock. Our watches were not on our wrists. The sun and the sea governed our lives...the men worked the sea and the sound from sunrise to sundown. The women kept the home fires burning morning, noon, and night (Parr 2002, 50).

He described an informal sense of measurement as well, and the tendency to make deals with handshakes rather than written contracts.

Many a land battle between families on these islands has been the result of promises made by ancestors that were not recorded. A lot of land deals were done by a mere handshake...When the old islanders did measure anything, it was in yards and they used a “pacer.” A “pacer” was someone in the community know for his ability to step a yard...My uncle was a pacer...he would raise his arms up...and step forward, swinging his arms dramatically, pacing and counting out loud. He was a “pacer” who married a “finder” from...Ocracoke...she had the gift of being able to use her toes to find the biggest and best clams” Parr 2002, 51).

## 7.6. Frisco

### 7.6.1. Name, Place, and Features

Frisco village, on the western side of the Cape elbow of Hatteras Island (Figure 7.6.1.), was a small but thriving satellite of Buxton until the Hatteras Inlet was reopened in the mid-1800s and Hatteras Village became the economic center of the island. Commerce and people were siphoned from Kinnakeet and the Cape to the southernmost village at the inlet. Frisco's population declined throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to cultural geographer Gary Dunbar, the village's population was 205 in 1910, 149 in 1930, and 126 in 1940 (Dunbar 1956). Early family names of Frisco include Austin, Barnett, Basnett, Farrow, Fulcher, Jennette, Quidley, Rollinson, Stowe, Tolson, William, and Whidbee.



Figure 7.6.1. Satellite Image of Frisco.  
Source: NC Division of Marine Fisheries.

Frisco was originally called “Trent” or “Trent Woods,” and was “never a nucleated settlement, so close to Buxton” (Dunbar 1956, 173). The village, according to Dunbar, likely experienced a population decline because of poor fishing; he predicted, however, that Frisco’s population would rise with tourism, a prediction that came to pass when the Bonner Bridge ushered in tourists and land prospectors. The village’s population was 300 by 1985 (Payne 1985) and 845 in 2000 (Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce). Dunbar also rightly predicted that the boundaries between Frisco and Buxton would become imperceptible. Like other Banks’ villages, Frisco in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a mix of old and new, with old graves juxtaposing modern homes, orderly subdivisions not far from traditional homes on meandering roads, and wooden work boats next to sleek fiberglass sports fishing vessels (Figures 7.6.2-3).



Figure 7.6.2. Fulcher Family Graveyard in Frisco Subdivision.  
Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

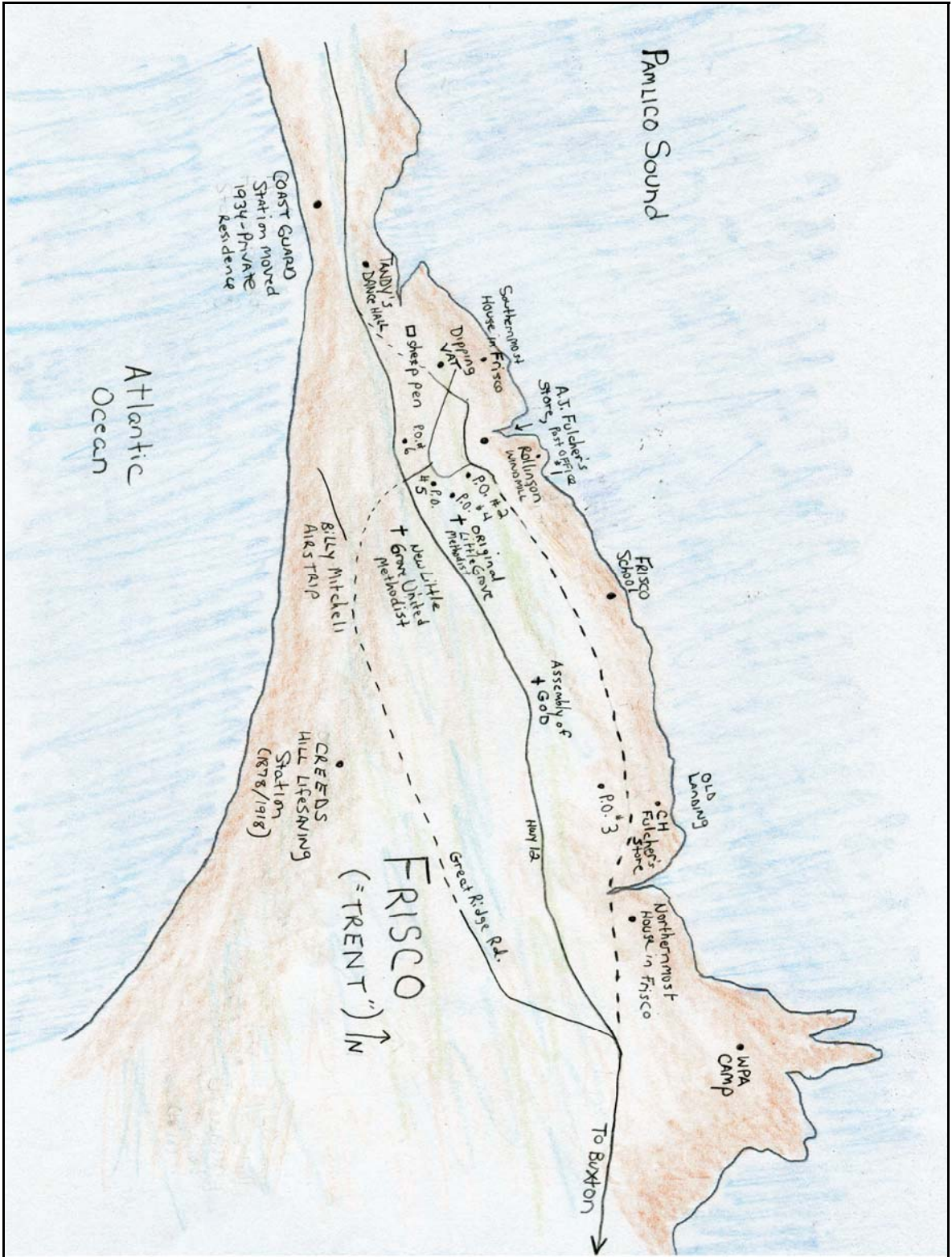


Figure 7.6.3. Frisco Volunteer Fire Department's "Beast." Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Frisco was the site of Creeds Hill Lifesaving Station 20 years before the first post office was established in 1898 (Map 7.6). The village may have avoided obsolescence due to activities associated with the station and attending families. "The men [of the Life Saving crews] built little houses up there for their families and they just started growing," reflected an islander. "Villages got started by these stations." Trent, however, was established long before the Lifesaving Station.

A prominent feature of Frisco was the thick, forested area continuing from the southern boarder of the community into Buxton woods. Their woodsy village is likely why residents received the old nickname "Frisco Ticks." The moist, wooded territory was a breeding ground for mosquitoes; villagers made smudge pots out of kerosene-soaked rags and kept them smoking on the porch. They splashed kerosene on screens, and applied it to the bedsprings. A resident recalled that the houses in Trent were small, although they were likely no smaller than other

houses throughout the Outer Banks before World War II. “They had a living room and a kitchen, two bedrooms, no bathrooms. All had outside toilets.” They got electricity in 1948. “I was glad to see it – but didn’t see nothing special,” remarked a villager.



Map 7.6. Frisco Village with Historical Sites (not to scale). Sketch by B. Garrity-Blake.



Like all pre-World War II homesteads on the Banks, Trenters had several out-buildings including smoke houses for ham and fish. To smoke fish, villagers scaled them and layered them in a keg with coarse salt. They filled the keg with water and weighed the fish down with a brick. They covered the barrel and brine mixture with cheesecloth and left it alone for about a week. Then they removed the fish and washed them in fresh water; the fish were attached through the tail to an opened wire coat hanger and hung inside the smoke house. A large iron kettle was filled with kindling and green persimmon or green oak wood; it was lit and allowed to smolder in the smoke house for two or three days. The smudge was removed from the scales, and the fish would keep for long lengths of time. To prepare for cooking, the fish was soaked in fresh water overnight and then fried (Jones 1973).

A resident recalled a typical summer day growing up in Trent:

Our parents called us to get up in the morning and breakfast would be on the table, always something hot...biscuits. My youngest brother and I always went fishing with our mother and father in the evening. But best of all, Papa would go out and fish his nets early in the morning and we had fish for breakfast (Nunn 2002, 20).

“Whatever our parents did, we were right there helping,” she recalled, including weeding the garden, boiling clothes on “wash day,” ironing them the following day, scrubbing floors, and night fishing. “We scrubbed floors about twice a week and they were beautiful...used wood ashes to make lye, to scrub in the chairs and benches and floors...looked like new lumber all the time” (Nunn 2002, 20). Night fishing –also called “dingbatting” or “hauling”– was also a typical family activity.

A famous landmark of Frisco is a series of large sand dunes known as Stowe’s Hills. Creed’s Hill, the largest, was the site of a lifesaving station. The hilly area protected Union troops who erected temporary encampments during the Civil War, and in the 1880s porpoise camps could be found along the beach as there was a small rendering factory in Trent.

A small harbor, dug in the 1960s, is the present site of Scotch Bonnet Marina. The harbor was especially important when Hatteras villagers were shuttled on and off their newly-created island after Hurricane Isabel cut a channel south of Frisco. Until the new inlet was filled in late November, Hatteras village students were transported by boat to the Frisco harbor and then bussed to school in Buxton.

### **7.6.2. Relation to Other Villages and Beyond**

Despite its close proximity to Buxton, Frisco was long thought of as its own village. It lost population from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s to Hatteras, and a villager recalled when Frisco almost died out for lack of work. “In Frisco there were some stores up there and people did a little bit of gill net fishing, setting nets out nights and going fishing in the mornings. Frisco almost faded out because the people kept leaving. They went off on work.” Frisco, however, did not go the way of Portsmouth Island, Scabbertown, Little Kinnakeet and other abandoned settlements.

“There is...a lot of rivalry among the Seven Villages of Hatteras Island,” wrote Ben MacNeill, excluding Ocracoke. “They combine and make common cause only when they are pitted in some matter against the single village on the next island – and in turn they all combine...when there is some conflict, usually against the upper end of the county” (MacNeill 1958, 94). Yet, Frisco’s survival was due, in no small part, to its interdependent relationship with Buxton and Hatteras. Village rivalry subsided substantially once the schools were consolidated in the 1950s, and Frisco has experienced a population increase partly because of families seeking to live near the Buxton-based school.

Frisco, like Buxton, is viewed as a safer place to live with respect to storms and flooding.

When asked how the community of Frisco was different from other Hatteras communities, a resident replied, “Frisco is higher ground. That’s probably about the only difference.”

According to Payne (1985), Frisco is actually lower than Hatteras and Buxton villages: it sits at five feet above sea level compared to 10 feet for both Hatteras and Buxton. Frisco does, however, have an impressive bank of hills, and its thick groves of trees offer protection from storms.

When Frisco was known as Trent, it seemed to have a mysterious reputation in the minds of many Hatteras Islanders. Perhaps because of the thick woods, Trent almost had a fairy-tale quality. Trent Woods was the home of Rodanthe’s mythological Old Buck, the bull that is commemorated every year during Old Christmas. Also, local legend describes a witch named Polly Poiner who lived in the woods and cast spells on cattle and horses. A local stockman blamed her for his sick livestock; he stormed into her “hut” while she was spinning and “broke her neck” (Wechter 1975, 180). The stockman was tried and hanged; locals claim it represented the “only legal hanging ever executed in Hyde County” (ibid). The ballad below describes the event (“Mattamuskeet” refers to Lake Mattamuskeet, near the mainland county seat of Swan Quarter).

Oh, the yaupon scrub and scraggly oak, quivered on the dunes when Polly spoke.  
A madman turned a trick quite neat, but the noose hung high in Mattamuskeet  
(Wechter 1975, 180).

Connie Farrow recalled the sensory experience of growing up in Frisco in the 1920s.

You could listen to the ocean’s roar and tell pretty well what direction the wind would be the next day. You could tell by the sunset whether it would be rainy or clear. You could walk down the road in the early morning and hear people grinding their coffee beans. You could smell such a sweet aroma from the fresh boiling coffee. Another sound we miss is the chopping of wood. Everyone burned wood in those days and even the smoke from a wood fire smelled good. We also miss the honking of the geese and the cranking of the brant (Farrow 1976-77, 52).

A Frisco woman recalled when everyone knew everyone else, not only in the village of Frisco but on the entire island. She said that if a stranger appeared, it would “scare you to death,” a stark contrast to today’s non-stop flow of tourists.

### **7.6.3. School**

In the mid-1800s a small school operated in “Trent,” and a schoolmaster rescued from a shipwreck in 1837 left an impression on the community. Joshua Daily had been bound for a teaching job in Virginia when the brigantine *Ralph* broke up off Hatteras. He was enlisted to teach in Trent, which had become “the economic center of the Seven [Hatteras Island] Villages” (less Ocracoke) at the time (MacNeill 1958, 111). Yet, there was a paucity of school supplies, and Daily was compelled to teach without books and make use of geese quills and a mixture of pokeberry juice and indigo for writing. In 1845 the wreck of the *Ontario* brought a big supply of English rag paper for the Trent school. Daily and student John Rollinson, who would eventually serve as Collector of the Port at Hatteras and fish for the porpoise factory, wrote an arithmetic textbook out of the salvaged paper. They stitched the pages together with linen thread, and covered the book with sailcloth. One year later John Rollinson began teaching school himself at age 19, as “the ascending fortunes of [Hatteras] village made it desirable that they have a school of their own” (MacNeill 1958, 112).

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the center of gravity had shifted to Hatteras and Frisco was no longer a hub. The Frisco School closed around 1920. A villager born in Frisco in 1915 reported attending school in Buxton in the 1920s, and then transferred to Hatteras in order to graduate. She said in her day, “they didn’t have [school] in Frisco yet,” implying that a school opened once again. But, by the 1940s, Frisco children were attending school in Buxton.

#### **7.6.4. Church**

The Little Grove United Methodist Church long served Frisco, as has the Frisco Assembly of God. For every Methodist church on Hatteras and Ocracoke, there is a Pentecostal as well. Cape Hatteras Baptist Church, a relatively new church, also operates in Frisco.

Little Grove Methodist Church was founded in the early 20th century but destroyed in the 1933 storm. The congregation met in homes until Frisco villager George Austin donated land for a new church building. The new church was dedicated in 1940. Little Grove “fed half the people of Buxton” during the depression, and members also attended Pentecostal tent revivals at Little Kinnakeet. “Our church was the center of our lives,” recalled a villager. “Sometimes we would go to Hatteras or up to the Cape – Buxton – for revivals” (Nunn 2002, 21). Maggie Whedbee Austin, whose husband George donated the land for the new church, was very active in Little Grove. She served as Sunday school teacher, pianist, bell-ringer and fire-lighter (ibid, 22). George Austin, not an “outwardly religious man,” and did not attend services; he referred to Little Grove as “Maggie’s church” (Duncan and DiSabatino, n.d.).

#### **7.6.5. Stores**

There were few stores in Frisco. The son of a freight boat captain remembered one owned by Eddie Williams, and explained the cost of transporting goods to him:

I got a [ledger] book upstairs. This fellow from Frisco, named Eddie Williams, used to have a store. My father brought a case of tomatoes down. The whole case of tomatoes cost \$1.33. He charged ten-cent freight from Elizabeth City and delivered it to Frisco, well, they called it “Trent” in them days.

A.J. Fulcher owned a store located in the center of the community, which was one of the largest stores on the island at the time. A.J. Fulcher’s was a popular place for villagers to gather and tell

stories in the evening. “Everyone paid his grocery bill at the end of the week,” recalled a villager who grew up in Frisco in the 1920s.

The main thing our fathers used to do was to gather at Mr. A.J. Fulcher’s store at night. It was interesting to listen to the stories they could tell. Around nine o’clock, they would leave and go home. Mr. Fulcher’s store was located about the center of Frisco, so some of the men had quite a long way to walk. From far away you could hear some of them strike up and sing (Farrow 1976-77, 54).

#### **7.6.6. Pastimes and Childhood Activities**

Children played in the sound, swimming, crabbing, and clamming. “The boys with their carts...went to play mostly down at the landing where they caught crabs and cleaned and roasted them on the shore,” recalled Maggie Whedbee (Nunn 2002, 21). “We had a little boat that our granddaddy made us that we’d get to shove around,” a villager remembered. Another described family campouts at the beach in the late 1950s, early 1960s:

We’d go to the beach Friday night and stay until Sunday evening. We go and build a big bonfire, find us a gully. All of our kids would find them a hill they wanted to sleep on with their sleeping bag. We would put a lantern up, hang it on a post and have a bonfire. We’d cook and roast marshmallows and just sit there all night. Next morning we’d put our trash in bags and bury where we had the fire. Then we’d go out on the beach and fish all day long.

A Frisco villager pointed out that in the past, old residents spent more time with youngsters:

Old people took the time to play with you. They would always play hide and seek or whatever. They would give us an old comb and a piece of cigarette paper—they used to roll their cigarettes with that real thin paper—and, they that’s how they taught us how to make music. You could play anything you wanted on it, [as with a kazoo]. That was our music band—our washboard and tub.

Adults often helped children make cookies or candy, not with recipes but with improvisation.

“A little bit of this and a little bit of that. Then you’d taste it until you got it just right.” They introduced games to children like rummy, rook, and dominoes. Adults also taught children good

manners, such as not to “sit with your legs gapped open.” On Sunday afternoons after church children played baseball, an event that garnered a lot of interest from adults. “Everyone...was interested in what the young people were doing,” wrote Maggie Austin in her diary. “The last big game I played was in 1918 in front of our house...There must have been 50 parents standing against our fence watching” (Nunn 2002, 20).

Some of the older people enjoyed sitting on the porch and dipping snuff. A villager’s grandmother used to “go out there and take a yaupon bush and pull a little piece off of it. And then she’d chew the end and make a brush out of it. That’s what she dipped down in that stuff to stick down in her jaws. She called it salt snuff.”

Frisco families attended dances at folk’s homes, doing the Virginia Reel or Black Bottom to Walter Barnett’s accordion or organ. They had easy access to the nightspots in Hatteras village that became prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s. Tandy’s was a popular nightspot in Frisco where young people from Hatteras, Frisco, Buxton, and Avon would congregate for jukebox dancing. As in other villages, young people participated in “basket parties” and simple house-to-house get-togethers.

We got together for chicken stews and to cook collards in each others homes, with parents talking in other rooms, and the boys and girls cooking and dancing in the kitchen...boys didn’t keep dates without their coats and ties on. The girls dressed up, too. We had a phonograph with a horn stuck out front and the records were round like a tin can...someone played the mouth harp or accordion (Nunn 2002, 20).

#### **7.6.7. Medical Care**

A Frisco resident recounted a story of her brother being born in a boat that illustrates the challenges faced by expectant mothers on a barrier island. All her siblings were born at home with a midwife “except my brother, David. Momma left and they were going to carry her to Elizabeth City on that boat. She said she got on the boat and in about an hour she was back. Her

and Aunt Laurie coming up the path holding a baby in her arms. She done had the baby.” “Aunt Rovine” Quidley of Buxton served as midwife to Frisco families for many decades.

Sally Ann Austin “was a midwife who nursed the whole community of Frisco but she was often abusive to her own children,” wrote her descendants in an unpublished genealogy (Duncan and DiSabatino, n.d.). The story of “Aunt Sally Ann” (b.1876, d. 1954) is extraordinary: the midwife took up with a local man and banished her husband, Marchant, “to the loft to sleep.” Marchant, “lackadaisical about employment,” put up little resistance, as his wife’s lover often provided food to the family. Sally Ann eventually ran off with the lover to New Bern, leaving her husband to grow old and senile with one of their sons (ibid).

Villagers also took advantage of services offered by midwives and doctors in Buxton.

Villagers were relatively self-sufficient for everyday ailments.

It was up to our mom to patch it up. I was telling the preacher the other day it’s a wonder we’re not all dead. We had a cough or we got sick, they’d take a spoonful of sugar and put kerosene in it. We always got a bottle of castor oil. She would hold our nose and say swallow this, then give us a drink of coffee or orange juice. I can still taste that stuff now, it’s terrible.

Home remedies used by villagers included mustard plaster and red balsam in liquid form for bronchitis. They also used camphor gum liniment, asafetida, paregoric, laudanum, and sassafras tea.

Maggie Austin, Sally Ann Austin’s daughter-in-law, recalled when the whole village of Trent was afflicted with the flu epidemic of 1918-1919. Everyone had gathered to play or watch a baseball game on Sunday afternoon. One of the players took sick, and the game broke up. The next day many were ill.

Monday morning everybody was sick in bed at our house. Later that day we heard that all the families were sick except a neighbor, Mr. George Farrow. He went from house to house taking care of us. He made bean soup and took it around to people for about a week. I guess it must have been a month before people began to get out. This had been



mass influenza. Many died all over the country. Some died here, including my sister and her two-year-old daughter (Nunn 2002, 20).

### **7.6.8. Early Communication**

People of Frisco first recall newspapers when the Midgett brothers began their bus service and started transporting them in. For emergencies they could use the telephone at Creeds Hill Coast Guard station. In the late 1930s families began wiring their homes for electricity, and could upgrade from battery to electric radios. “We finally threw out the kerosene lamps,” mused an old-timer. “Electricity came along – we thought that was the greatest and my first appliance was a washing machine” (Nunn 200, 21-22). Frisco residents began getting televisions around 1960, but received only three channels. “Every time the wind shifted the picture would fade out and it’d all be a bunch of racket. We never got to see the end of a movie.”

### **7.6.9. Postal Service**

The post office was established in 1898, changing the name of the village from Trent to Frisco. The first postmaster was named Wallace, an avid traveler who had shipwrecked off Hatteras Island and married a local woman. Wallace had been especially fond of San Francisco, and suggested that as a new name for Trent Woods. The U.S. Postal Service, perhaps thinking that San Francisco was “too long and too pretentious for such a small hamlet,” settled on Frisco (Wechter 1975, 180; Payne 1985). The short and easily spelled “Trent” was discarded to avoid confusion with another Trent on the mainland (Payne 1985). Minnie Fulcher was postmaster in the 1930s. Connie Farrow’s father poled the 16-foot juniper shove skiff that would meet the mail boat each morning and evening; he was paid \$6 dollars per month (Farrow 1976-77).

## 7.6.10. Early Trade

### 7.6.10.1. Yaupon Tea

Frisco was known for its yaupon tea production, a beverage introduced to European settlers by the Hatteras Indians. Yaupon is a member of the holly family and grows in abundance in coastal North Carolina. Aboriginal peoples along the coastal plain ritualistically imbibed not only the tea made from yaupon leaves but, also the mildly toxic berries as well for purgative and emetic purification, hence the plant's scientific name *Ilex vomitoria*. The Outer Banks colonists drank yaupon tea as a patriotic substitute for British tea during the Revolutionary War. It was also popular as a staple on West Indies ships as an "antidote to scurvy" (MacNeill 1958, 55). Yaupon –or "Japan" tea– continued to be manufactured on Hatteras Island until the early 1930s.

John Whedbee processed yaupon tea in Frisco and turned the endeavor into industry. His daughter, Maggie Austin, explained that Whedbee would place the yaupon branches in a trough and "twig" it with a knife. Careful to remove the poisonous berries, he would then chop the twigs into small pieces with an axe. He would heat ballast stones in a fire and place yaupon and hot stones in a barrel or "hogshead" in alternating layers. The barrel was buried in the sand and left for three days. Once the yaupon was cured or "sweated" he would dry it on large racks in the sun. It was bagged and sold for one dollar per bushel. He shipped six to eight bushels at a time across the sound to Elizabeth City.

Another tea maker, Alonzo Stowe, would put the yaupon in a hole in the ground lined with tin from fifty-pound lard cans. At the bottom of the pit were stones that he had collected on the beach, heated red hot. He would "sweat" the yaupon for a week, then dry it while turning it daily and covering it with canvas to avoid mildew. Stowe sold yaupon tea for twenty-five cents

per gallon or fifty cents per peck; he did this for 11 years during his time off from the Coast Guard (Winslow 1979).

Yaupon production peaked during the Civil War period when harbors were blockaded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Van Dolsen 1999, 6), although an elderly black man ran a “yoapon factory” in 1903 in Frisco (Stick 1958, 177).

“There wasn’t a thing wrong with the people,” Whedbee’s daughter remarked, referring to the local stigma that developed against the brew. “But it’d make them mad whenever you mentioned yaupon tea.” Whedbee was one of two families in Frisco still processing yaupon in the 1930s (Wechter 1975). Today, in 2004, yaupon is processed occasionally by at least one family for personal consumption.

Investors from Norfolk built a large warehouse in Frisco around the early 1920s for the eel grass or “sea oar” industry as started in Avon by C.T. Williams. But, “because of the scarcity of eel grass there, they soon sold out to Williams” (Stick 1958, 234).

Another product coming from Trent and the Cape area was firewood. Villagers from Hatteras went to Frisco for chords of dry live oak and cedar that were cut from the surrounding forest and in Buxton’s woods, selling anywhere between fifty cents to four dollars a chord before World War II. Bankers came down from Chicamacomico as well, for there were no trees on the northern part of the island to supply families with pine needed for cooking and heating. Frisco even marketed firewood across the sound. Before fishermen traveled to mainland areas for pound net stakes, Frisco sold to Hatteras village fishermen 16 to 24-foot long pine stakes for fifteen cents apiece.

A windmill in Frisco had the reputation for making “the best meal on the island,” and was run by the Rollinson family (MacNeill 1958). The site of the mill was along the soundside

shore, but because of erosion the millstones were, in the 1950s, discovered several hundred feet out into the water. The Frisco mill, like other island mills of the era, was of the “German” type rather than the “Dutch” model. It consisted of a “huge sailed wheel” on a large pillar and a “massive outrigger beam with a wheel fixed against the ground” (MacNeill 1958, 94).

With every shift of the wind the miller gets down and rolls the beamed wheel around until the house heads into the wind. In the Dutch type the works are fixed on a tower and only the roof of it is turned to head the sail into the wind...that just wouldn't do in the winds that prevail around Cape Hatteras (MacNeill 1958, 94-95).

A Trent resident recalled his father working carpentry, not “by the clock” but by the sun: “You started at sunrise and you quit at sundown. They got paid \$1.25 per day” (Farrow 1976-77, 52). An informal sense of time has not disappeared on Hatteras Island, and newcomers commonly complain about native laborers who operate on “island time” and show up at “all hours” or not at all if the fish are running.

### **7.6.11. Commercial Fishing**

Frisco residents fished in the ocean out of Hatteras village, set nets in the sound, or participated in the beach haul seine fishery. The Cape, off Buxton, has long been a choice spot for the dories to work (Figures 7.6..4-5). “They’d row all up and down the beach, and when they’d catch their fish they would have to leave them there,” reported Belton Rollinson. “Only means was to get them by horse and cart over to the bay, what we called the Back Landing Creek.” As the Cape itself presented a wide landmass to cross, the fishermen would cart their catch over to the sound side at the thinnest part, the north end of Buxton from the ocean side to Back Landing Creek. Back Landing Creek was also known as Cape Creek. They did not transport the fish to Hatteras village via the ocean, as it was too rough, and the buy-boats and fish

houses were in the Pamlico. “They’d put them in boats and then sailed them to Hatteras to the fish markets” (Baum et al. 1976-77, 46).



Figure 7.6.4. Frisco Dories. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.



Figure 7.6.5. Dory Net Sign. Photo by B. Garrity-Blake.

Frisko was the only village outside of Hatteras village and Shell Castle (Ocracoke) that housed a porpoise factory, worked by Trenter John Rollinson and crew. It was an outgrowth of the Hatteras operation, as dolphins caught near the cape were difficult to transport to Hatteras

Village. “In the 1880s John Rollinson, Tom Fulcher, and James Stowe were important fishermen who brought porpoises to the Trent factory where oil was extracted and hides prepared. A porpoise season usually netted the fishermen close to \$5,000; the manufacturers, \$10,000” (Wechter 1975, 178). The Trent factory did not operate as long as the Hatteras plant, and was probably a smaller operation.

Alvin Fulcher of Frisco still had some hand-tied cotton fishing nets to show to Cape Hatteras school students in 1976. Each fisherman had a stand of about twenty-five 30-yard cotton nets, before monofilament was invented circa World War II. Fulcher used a hand-carved juniper net gauge and needle to make his nets, sewn around the woodstove during cold winter months. “Once the net was tied it was attached to cotton lines,” Cape Hatteras School students reported. “The floats on the lines were made from genuine cork. There were no plastic or foam corks as there are today. To make lead weights, Mr. Fulcher poured the lead out flat and then cut pieces of it and wrapped it around the cotton lines” (Gray and Umphlett 1976-77, 50). Fulcher said that he fished right off Frisco inside the reef, and typically left his fish by the roadside to be picked up by the mail truck and delivered to the icehouse in Hatteras.

In recent years a declining market was cited as a reason for dwindling numbers of fishermen and shrinking fortunes. Imported products caused shrimp and crab to be sold at prices not seen in decades. A Frisco couple, reminiscing that they paid 39 cents for a bag of sugar, 25 cents for a pound of hamburger, and one penny for five pieces of candy before World War II added, “the only thing that isn’t changed is [the price] we get for our commercial fish.”

### **7.6.12. Hunting**

Villagers in Frisco had an island-wide reputation for their waterfowl hunting skills, and many “market-hunted,” selling commercial quantities of waterfowl to northern buyers. They consumed shore birds and feasted on gull eggs in times of scarcity. They also hunted small white-tailed deer and rabbit in the woods of Buxton and Frisco. Villagers fished in the fresh water ponds for bass as well. According to Rodanthe’s legend of “Old Buck,” a hunter from Frisco woods shot the mythical bull, ending the animal’s prolific reign of siring calves, and starting its mysterious role of appearing at Old Christmas each year. This story underscores the reputation of Frisco forest-dwellers as accomplished hunters.

### **7.6.13. Livestock and Gardening**

Frisco residents were no different than other Hatteras Islanders in keeping chickens, pigs, perhaps a dairy cow, and free-roaming livestock. They were also known for keeping sheep. Frisco Woods may have been the home of Rodanthe’s “Old Buck,” but Frisco villagers had a flesh-and-blood bull to contend with: Old Albert.

Between Hatteras and Frisco, we had an old bull out on the beach. They called him Old Albert. That sucker would chase you. We had to watch for him when we was going. We kept watch on Old Albert. You see him plow the ground a little bit with his front feet, you better get out of the way. Cause he was coming.

People broke horses by driving them into the ocean and climbing on their backs. “You could stay on till they hit dry ground. Then they’d throw you.”

When the government decided that they were losing the war on cattle ticks, and their dipping-vat policy was somewhat of a failure, they worked to eradicate free ranging herds by offering a five-dollar bounty for each animal. An islander named Hall Roosevelt shot the last cow on Hatteras in 1938 with an old-model Springfield rifle from 800 yards away. “The county

authorities solemnly paid him \$5 dollars, which he casually handed to the CCC youth who had accompanied him on the hunt” (MacNeill 1958, 70).

Trenters cultivated small gardens, and enjoyed richer soil than the low, sandy areas of the island. A Hatteras resident recalled traveling to his uncle’s in Frisco to get vegetables from his garden. People also walked up to Frisco to pick the abundant blackberries and wild grapes that grew in the area.

The biggest meal of the week was Sunday dinner, which would be prepared Saturday night. A villager wondered at the lack of refrigeration and little problem with spoilage:

Food didn’t spoil back then like it does now-a-days. They’d cook fried chicken, potato salad and ice tea, and put it on the table - after you eat, there was a cover put over it. Suppertime, we’d take that cover off and get another plate and eat supper and it tasted just as good and didn’t spoil.

#### **7.6.14. Perceptions of Environment and Storms**

A Frisco villager said that she and her husband had built on family property that they thought was immune to flooding, but that proved incorrect in 1993 during Hurricane Emily. “We got wiped out just about. We had 42 trees down. It tore the back side of the house out. We sit here in the [porch] swing and watched the trees pop off.” Her cat was missing all day, but when they opened the door to let the rising tide wash through the house, he was hanging on the screen. “He looked like he was about drowned!”

The family attributed their unusual flooding event to the construction of a sizeable campground in Frisco, meaning fewer trees and more hills to “trap the water” from flowing over the area back into the ocean or sound. They pointed out that the 1993 storm brought the first flooding to Buxton that people could remember, and linked that to dune construction.



Before tourism became rampant, villagers typically did not evacuate but simply took what precautions they could and hoped for the best:

Most would batten down and weather it out. Back then you kept an eye on your barometer and listened to your radio. A lot of the places had shutters, they would board up. If you had electricity you made sure you had plenty of kerosene for your lamps 'cause you knew you weren't going to have no lights.

An islander described the shift of wind that causes the sound to wash over the island; he attributed the building of sand dunes in the 1930s to increased flooding in the area:

If [the storm] goes inland south of us, the wind moves around this way and it ends up north and the ocean get rough, real rough. It puts the water in the sound and pushes it on the other side sound. All of a sudden it gets real calm. The clouds are all gone for 15 or 20 minutes and then the wind comes from this way, one hundred plus [miles per hour]. That water comes back fast and floods the island. When they built these sand dunes in the '30s it was the worst thing in my opinion. The water, with the sand dunes, couldn't get to the ocean and that's what gave us such a high water.

#### **7.6.15. Rituals and Community Events**

Weddings in Frisco were simple affairs, and often took place at an early age. "I grew up with my young'uns, I sure did," said a village woman. A resident described getting married in 1953 at age sixteen, and had five children by the time she was twenty-one. "They were like stair steps," she said, "But the last were twins so they come fast." Three of her children were born at a Buxton clinic; one daughter was born at the Navy Base in Buxton, and her twins were born in Elizabeth City. Her husband worked for the state highway department for 62 cents an hour. Because they were lacking in funds, their recreation consisted of loading the kids in the back of a truck and heading for the beach to fish and cook out.

Frisco families recall earlier Christmases that were marked with visiting and feasting more than gift-giving:

I remember pies and cakes Momma would cook for Christmas, and she'd put them upstairs in one of our bedrooms that didn't have no heat. They had a long board that went across like shelves. Somebody come, alright young'un, go get one of them pies and bring it down. They'd always serve them a wedge of pie.

Some decorated trees with popcorn and hung stockings, but gifts were kept simple, reflecting both the scarcity of wealth on the island and the sparse way of living:

We'd get one apple, one orange, two nuts, two or three little pieces of hard candy, and that was our stocking. And, then we'd get one toy. Sometimes it would be a doll baby. But, it was always just one thing. And, we were just as happy with that as kids [today] getting half a living room full.

#### **7.6.16. Coast Guard and the Military**

Creed's Hill Lifesaving Station was built just south of Frisco in 1878 on one of the largest sand dunes in an area known as Stowe's Hills. Rocky Rollinson helped re-build the station in 1918. "The Coast Guard has been one of the greatest assets of this place of anything I've ever known in my life," said a Frisco resident. This resident estimates that, in 2004, "75 percent of the families right here all the way from Rodanthe to Hatteras is receiving a retirement check or active duty check."

The daughter of a lighthouse keeper recalled times when her father would be away for three months at a time tending the Diamond Shoals Lightship. During these long stretches her mother, Maggie Austin, "would sit and play with us, study with us. We could talk to her about anything and she always listened to us" (Nunn 2002, 22). Yet, her husband's long absences made for rough reunions:

They spent thirty-six years of their marriage with George running his life apart from Maggie who was raising a family. When they occupied the same house [whenever George was on leave] they engaged in a power struggle. Maggie was used to making decisions regarding the family without input from George. George was used to giving orders and having them obeyed (Duncan and DiSabatino, n.d.)

### **7.6.17. Law Enforcement**

John Rollinson, born in Trent, had moved to Hatteras in 1846 to teach school, and became a Justice of the Peace for Hyde County. Frisco was home to one of the first sheriff's deputies; Dewey Basnight. Later his brother Raymond Basnight followed suit. The latter was "very popular with the sheriff's department. He was chief deputy under Frank Cahoon, in Manteo, and Hatteras Island was his whole cup of tea. He run everything as far as law enforcement on Hatteras Island."

### **7.6.18. Modernity and Perceptions of Change**

A Frisco resident pointed out that tourism and development, however overpowering, has provided employment to villagers and allowed them to stay on the island to work as opposed to earlier decades when people were compelled to leave. It saddened him to see some young residents not taking advantages of the opportunities that he would have appreciated when he was younger.

All three of my children today can work and stay here on the island and be with their family. When I was coming up you couldn't do that. My son's doing contract work, he doesn't have to worry. My other son works for Coastal Concrete in Buxton, he doesn't have to worry. My daughter and her husband have several businesses. The sky's the limit with young people here on the Outer Banks. I'm almost afraid we're going too far with over building, and a lot of people cuss it, but at the same daggone time where would we be without it? You got to take the bitter with the sweet.

He added that many of those residents who complain about growth and tourism are "implants. They come in from the outside and don't know what it was like before tourism got here."

The increase in jobs has its downside, according to a Frisco resident: "Everybody's so busy - mommas and dads are trying to make a living. They are both working, and the kids are

doing pretty well what they want.” Her husband added that development “is the worst thing that ever happened to Hatteras Island.”

It destroyed our woods. It destroyed our sound and everything else. More people. In the 30’s and 40’s you could go anywhere along this shore-side and pick you up a mess of oysters and clams or anything you wanted to. Everything is polluted now.

A contentious issue that fractured the village of Frisco was zoning. One of the controversies surrounded a proposed go-cart track, compelling some residents to question whether zoning was in order along a vacant stretch of Highway 12. Divisiveness and disagreement doomed the zoning proposal, however, which turned into a native versus newcomer conflict.

I can see where zoning has got a lot of good points, there’s a lot of things it helps. But, there’s a lot of things it don’t, so the majority of the local people who were here in Frisco a long time was against it. When [people] first move here they talk about such a beautiful place. “Oh, where we [lived] we can’t wash our car in our yard, we can’t do this, we can’t do that.” They move here and not six months later they try to get ordinances passed.

A Frisco woman bemoaned the loss of security that came from knowing everyone in the village:

You didn’t have to worry. We never locked our doors until the past 15 years. Never took the keys out of your car. You left your screen door open every night and left your windows all open. You didn’t worry about nobody coming around because you knew everybody. Everybody on the island knew everybody else.

Another simply missed her old friends and family, now deceased. “Always got along pretty good,” she mused. “All of a sudden I woke up without nobody to talk to – it’s been a quick change.” She was the oldest native in Frisco at eighty-eight, and added that “I’m grouchy, tired, and disgusted.” She was wary of the influx of visitors and new residents. “There are too many ants on this ant hill and I don’t like it.”



As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

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Cape Hatteras National Seashore  
1401 National Park Drive  
Manteo, North Carolina 27954

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