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LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

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Cape Lookout National Seashore Plans Lighthouse Sesquicentennial Celebration



Cape Lookout Lighthouse as viewed from the living room inside the Keeper's Quarters

Photograph by Bruce Roberts

Cape Lookout National Seashore with the help of local folks, including the Outer Banks Lighthouse Society, is planning a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse. Save the weekend of October 10, 2009, for the celebration. The Outer Banks Lighthouse Society will have its fall weekend gathering at the same time to share in the festivities. OBLHS members will receive more information later as plans develop. Festivities at the lighthouse will include spotlighting the lighthouse for several days and turning the light back on to honor its anniversary November 3, 2009. The dramatic relighting is just one of many special month-long activities planned by the park and partners.

Additionally, OBLHS members will gather for its annual dinner, auction, and awards program. We'll wrap up the weekend with Sunday brunch. This is guaranteed to be one of the most memorable maritime weekend events ever.

Restoration Plans Continue...

In the spring of 2008 the National Park Service had to suspend the popular "Open House" tours of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse for public safety reasons after an engineer's inspection revealed significant deterioration to the integrity of the tower's circular stairway. Before that report, the seashore had hoped to continue a limited schedule of tours, but it was clear from the engineer's report that to ensure public safety, the tours would need to be suspended until

A Brief History of the Bald Head Lighthouses

By Dr. Chris Fonvielle, Jr.

The content of a military directive dated February 1, 1863, surprised Lieutenant Colonel Washington Gwathmey, Confederate commander at Fort Caswell on Oak Island at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Gwathmey's superior officer, Major General W.H.C. Whiting, telegraphed from headquarters in Wilmington, North Carolina, instructing him to "blow up the lighthouse on Bald Head [Island]," directly across Old Inlet from Fort Caswell.

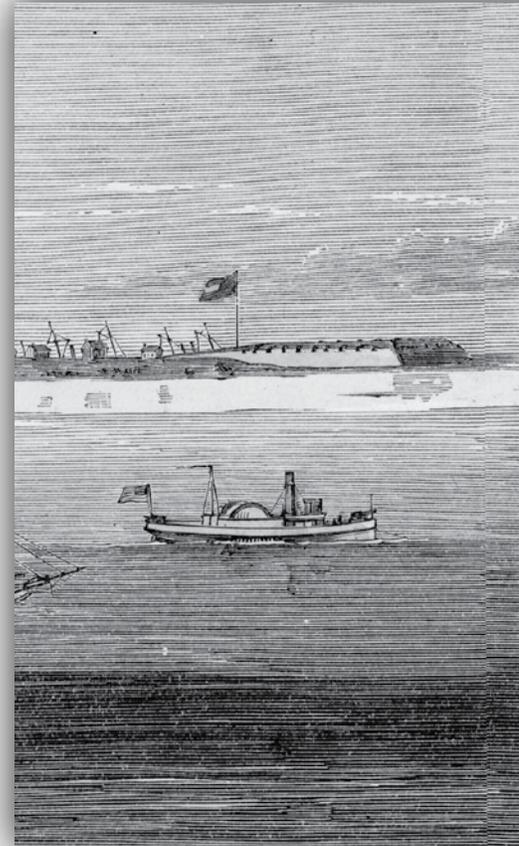
In Whiting's view, the lighthouse, vacant and vulnerable, posed a high security risk. From the top of the 90-foot tall brick tower, Union sailors—whom Confederates suspected were sneaking onto the largely deserted island from their blockading ships off Old Inlet—would have a commanding view of the Cape Fear estuary and its defenses. With a telescope or a pair of field glasses, they could easily detect the number of troops and cannon in Fort Caswell and at Fort Johnston in Smithville on the mainland just across the harbor. The blue-uniformed tars could also observe Confederate ships on the river as far north as New Inlet, five miles upriver.

For a day or so beforehand, soldiers at Fort Caswell had noticed an unusually large number of Union gunboats offshore. Informed of the build-up, Whiting suspected that it meant the Federals were assembling for an attack on Wilmington by way of Bald Head Island. Since the beginning of the war, a lack of troops and artillery compelled Confederate authorities to leave the island deserted and unprotected.

As a course of action, they had extinguished the Bald Head light in 1861. General Whiting appreciated the engineering and historical significance of the lighthouse, affectionately known as Old Baldy, but it no longer aided Confederate shipping. Vessels that ran the Union naval blockade of Wilmington to import essential supplies for the Confederacy, now depended on a more sophisticated system of color lights at Fort Caswell to guide them through Old Inlet and into the Cape Fear harbor.

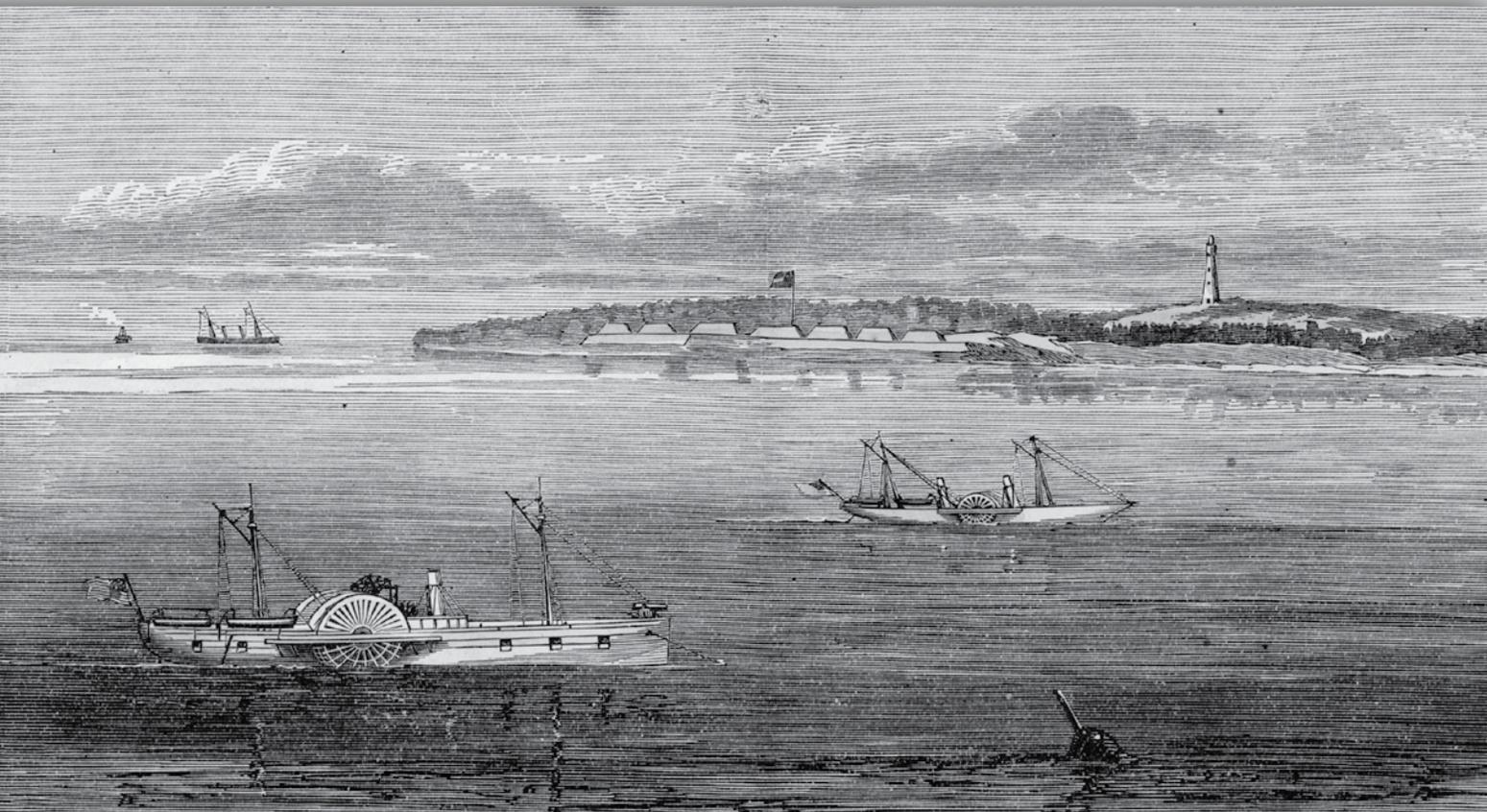
Undefended by the Confederates, Bald Head Island was the most vulnerable position in the Lower Cape Fear, yet none was more important. "[Bald Head Island] is the key of the harbor, affecting both [Old and New inlets]," Whiting informed General Robert E. Lee. To help safeguard Wilmington as a vital blockade running seaport, Whiting adopted a bold but controversial security measure—the destruction of Bald Head lighthouse.

Despite Whiting's instructions to Gwathmey, however, the detonation of Old Baldy did not occur. The increased squadron of Union ships off Old Inlet soon dispersed, the extra gunboats apparently having made just a temporary stop en route to attack Charleston, South Carolina. As for the Bald Head lighthouse, someone or something interceded to convince Whiting of the futility of its destruction, thus inadvertently preserving the historic structure.¹



Major General Whiting, who graduated at the top of his West Point class, also designed and built the Cape Lookout Lighthouse before the war.

Photograph from the author's collection



Union Naval Blockade of Old Inlet – Confederate Fort Holmes and Old Baldy in background. The view is looking north toward Old Inlet with Fort Caswell on Oak Island at left and Fort Holmes on Bald Head Island at right.

Engraving from Harper's Pictorial History of Civil War October 1864

By early 1863, Old Baldy had stood for almost fifty years. Built in 1816-1817, it went into operation when James Monroe began his first term as the fifth president of the United States. Until the early twentieth century, it helped mariners navigate their vessels across the bar at Old Inlet, and was an essential navigational aid for trade and commerce in the region.

Jutting into the Atlantic Ocean like a bent elbow, Cape Fear is the southernmost of North Carolina's three capes, including Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout. Of North Carolina's major waterways, only the Cape Fear River empties directly into the ocean. Most of the other rivers in the eastern part of the state flow into either Pamlico or Albemarle sounds.

According to some geologists, deposits of Pleistocene Epoch coquina formed the base of an ancient Cape Fear peninsula that existed about 25,000 years ago, and protruded another fifty miles further into the Atlantic than does today's. When the last ice age ended about 10,000 years ago, the rising sea covered most of the Cape Fear. What remains at the tip of that once imposing peninsula—now at the mouth of the Cape Fear River—is a series of truncated sand ridges, maritime forest, tidal marshes, and an eighteen mile-long reef of coarse sand and shell fragments known as Frying Pan Shoals. Other geologists

suggest that Bald Head Island is a delta created by silt filtering down the Cape Fear River, and supplemented by sand blown in by winds and pushed onto the island by the sea. Whatever its origins, Bald Head Island, like all barrier islands, is unstable—subject to the incessant pounding of the ocean's surf, constant winds, and seasonal storms.

The roughly triangular shaped island comprises about 12,000 acres and ten miles of shoreline in Brunswick County, North Carolina. It is bounded on the west by the murky waters of the Cape Fear River at Old Inlet, while the Atlantic Ocean washes ashore from the south and the east along what are appropriately known today as the South and East beaches. The island, variously known in North Carolina history as Barren Island, Cape Island, Palmetto Island, and Smith or Smith's Island, is commonly referred to as Bald Head Island because of its bare sandy beaches. By the eighteenth century, mariners had named the island's southwest corner—where the river meets the ocean—Bald Head Point, as it was devoid of vegetation except for sprouts of beach grass, and a nearby high sand dune known as Bald Head.

The island's South and East beaches intersect at Frying Pan Shoals, so named because the reef resembles the handle of a frying pan that connects to Bald Head Island. This is the Cape Fear, noted for both its beauty and its

A Brief History of the Bald Head Lighthouses continued...

danger. Early European explorers referred to the area as both Cape Fayre and Cape Fear because of its mild climate and treacherous waters. But mariners' fears of the cape proved greater than their awe of the alluring environment and the name Cape Fear stuck. It became known as the south end of North Carolina's graveyard of the Atlantic as many ships were wrecked on the Cape of Fear.²

The earliest land grant in the region was Bald Head Island, awarded by the Lords Proprietors of Carolina to Landgrave Thomas Smith, a wealthy South Carolina planter, on May 8, 1713. Title to the island was eventually held by Benjamin Smith, great grandson of Thomas Smith. Also a native of South Carolina, Benjamin Smith served as an aide-de-camp to George Washington during the American Revolution and enjoyed notable careers as both a wealthy Cape Fear planter and politician in his adopted state of North Carolina, including one term as governor, 1810-1811. Smith would play a prominent role in the establishment of a lighthouse on Bald Head Island.³

In 1784, the North Carolina General Assembly, interested in "facilitating the navigation" of the Cape Fear River, authorized a special duty to be paid by all vessels entering the harbor to the Board of Commissioners for Regulating Navigation and Pilotage of the Cape Fear River. The funds would underwrite the construction of a lighthouse near the mouth of the river. The commission determined that there was an urgent need for a lighthouse to help vessels avoid "the great shoal called Frying-Pan" and reach the port of Wilmington on the Cape Fear River.⁴

As efforts to raise revenues began, Benjamin Smith and members of the Commission of Navigation and Pilotage met on Bald Head in 1786 to select a location for a lighthouse on land Smith offered to donate. Three years later, Smith was appointed a member of the Commission, perhaps as a gesture to urge him to fulfill his pledge. Whatever motivated the Commission to make the appointment, it worked, as Smith transferred legal title for a ten acre plot on Bald Head Island to the state in 1790.

By then, however, North Carolina's role in building the lighthouse had shifted to the newly ratified United States government. On August 7, 1789, the First U.S. Congress approved a bill providing for federal construction, operation, and maintenance of lighthouses along the nation's seacoast. This was the earliest internal improvements' effort by the national government. In 1790, the North Carolina legislature transferred title of the land recently donated by Smith and all money collected for the Bald Head light to the federal government.⁵

Funds granted by the U.S. Congress in 1792 for the Bald Head project were small, perhaps because North Carolina

had already completed much of the work. Construction problems delayed its completion for another two-and-a-half years, but by early December 1794, the structure was "perfectly completed in every particular and ready for being lighted." The Wilmington Chronicle reported that the iron lantern, which measured 15 feet, 9 inches in height from the floor to the top of the roof, was first lit on December 23, 1794.⁶

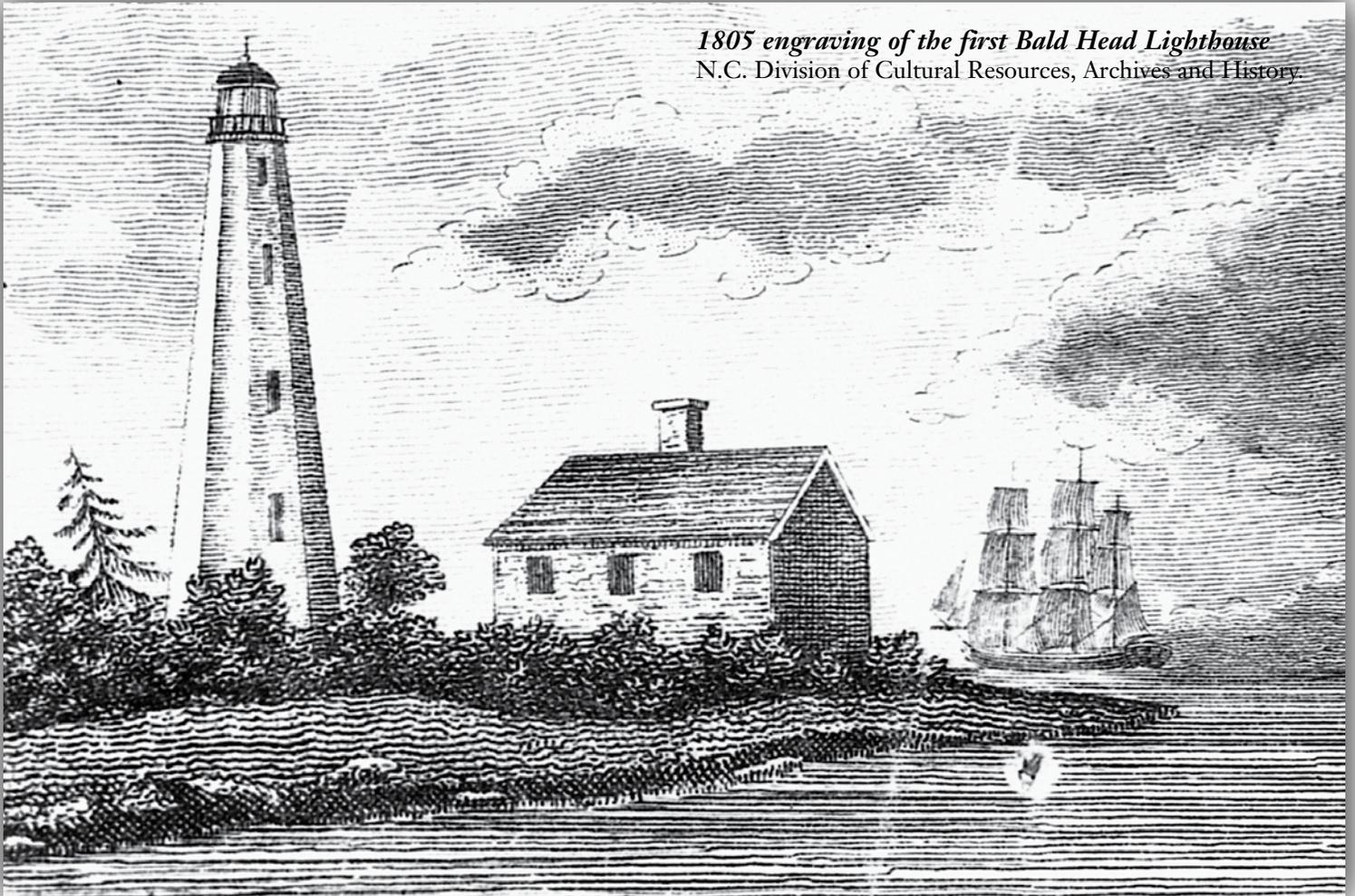
The precise location of Bald Head's first lighthouse has never been determined because the site is now underwater. In the original 1784 act, the state legislature instructed that the lighthouse be built "at the extreme point of Bald-Head or some other convenient place" near the Cape Fear River's bar. By 1810 the structure was so threatened by erosion that the federal government attempted to shore up the ground around it by driving poles in the sand and filling in between with brush. These measures proved ineffective, however, and by early July 1813, the Wilmington collector of customs warned mariners that there would be no light at the mouth of the Cape Fear River for the foreseeable future, as the lighthouse needed to be "pulled down."

Federal funds were appropriated in 1813 to erect a new lighthouse, but the government did not open bidding on the project for another three years. Daniel S. Way received the construction contract in the summer of 1816. Specifications called for a 90-foot tall octagon-shaped brick tower, thirty-six feet in diameter at the base and gradually decreasing to fourteen feet at the floor of the platform that would support the light itself. Way salvaged hundreds of thousands of bricks from the original lighthouse to use in the new structure. A brick dwelling for the lighthouse keeper was to be erected nearby. Whereas the first light had been built too close to the water, the site chosen for the new structure was a low bluff on the north side of Bald Head Island several hundred yards east of the river and more than half a mile back from the ocean.⁷

The completion date for Way's construction project was set for April 1, 1817, but the exact date that the light went into operation is not known. Some sources say 1817 while others claim 1818. Whale oil lamps originally provided illumination for the beacon. By 1841, fifteen to eighteen such lamps were used, according to W.C. Lord, superintendent of lighthouses in the Wilmington District. The whale oil lamps were replaced in 1855 with a 3rd Order Fresnel lens that reportedly cost \$10,000 and was imported from Paris, France. "[It is] a very fine specimen of ingenuity and skillful workmanship," observed a Confederate officer in 1864.⁸

No one seems to know who nicknamed the Bald Head light Old Baldy or when, but for most of the nineteenth century, it helped sailors navigate the shoal waters at the

1805 engraving of the first Bald Head Lighthouse
N.C. Division of Cultural Resources, Archives and History.



mouth of the Cape Fear River. But it was not the only light in the Lower Cape Fear. A schooner-rigged vessel, its hull painted yellow with “Frying Pan Shoals” in large black letters on each side, was stationed off the end of Frying Pan Shoals as early as 1854. The federal government also erected a small light structure, reportedly in 1816, on Federal Point peninsula above New Inlet, and replaced it with a taller brick lighthouse in 1837. Light drafted vessels plied New Inlet to trade along the North Carolina coast and in Baltimore, New York, and Boston.⁹

With the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861, Confederate military authorities closed North Carolina’s lighthouses and moved their lenses and fixtures to safer locations inland. They hoped that the absence of lights would hinder Union efforts to blockade the state’s seaports and inlets. The superintendent of lights at Wilmington received instructions on June 7, 1861, to take the lights that had been removed from Bald Head, Oak Island, and Confederate Point to the Custom House in Wilmington. Small light stations at Price’s Creek, Orton Point, Campbell Island, and the Upper Jetty near Wilmington, however, remained operational during the war to assist blockade runners on the Cape Fear River like approach lights on a well lit runway. The second lighthouse on Federal Point was dismantled in 1863 by soldiers stationed at Fort

Fisher, then under construction to protect New Inlet for blockade running ships. With Old Baldy’s light now also extinguished, the military erected a signal station at Fort Caswell on Oak Island to guide blockade-runners through Old Inlet.¹⁰

A sparsity of troops, laborers, and armament forestalled the Confederate occupation of Bald Head Island until early September 1863. General W.H.C. Whiting, commander of the District of the Cape Fear, grew increasingly concerned about the security of the island at the mouth of the Cape Fear River. He finally concluded that the Bald Head lighthouse needed to come down, as a means of preventing Union sailors from using it as an observation tower to inspect Confederate defenses in the estuary. Despite Whiting’s instructions for Lieutenant Colonel Washington Gwathmey to blow it up, however, it escaped demolition. In fact, after Confederate forces finally moved onto Bald Head Island, the Confederate high command decided to relight Old Baldy.

Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory detailed John Wilkinson, a successful blockade running sea captain and now a lieutenant in the Confederate States Navy, for special duty at Wilmington. On March 11, 1864, Wilkinson was instructed to “establish and preserve such

A Brief History of the Bald Head Lighthouses continued...

lights at Bald Head, [Fort Fisher], and at other places [that would] best aid trading vessels to enter and depart from the Cape Fear River.” By then Wilmington was the Confederacy’s principal seaport. Acting Rear Admiral S. Phillips Lee reported to U.S. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles on May 11, 1864, that the “rebels have established lights for both bars to Wilmington—one on Bald Head light-house, the other on the Mound [Battery at Fort Fisher]—for the blockade-runners.” Presumably, Old Baldy remained a navigational aid to Confederate shipping until the evacuation of Bald Head Island on January 16, 1865, following the fall of Fort Fisher and the Union advance into the Lower Cape Fear.¹¹

Old Baldy remained darkened for fourteen years after the Civil War. The Federal government concluded that, despite the Bald Head lighthouse’s imposing height, it could not be seen by vessels beyond fifteen miles at sea, especially ships attempting to get around Frying Pan Shoals. Although the

lighthouse was reactivated in 1879 and refitted with a new light four years later, the improvements did nothing to solve the Frying Pan Shoals problem. Engineers discussed elevating the Bald Head tower to 150-feet, but ultimately decided against the project in favor of constructing a new and more efficient light structure closer to Cape Fear.

The new Cape Fear Light Station, built on Bald Head’s East Beach, was activated in 1903, and remained in service for the following fifty-five years. Old Baldy was also kept burning, to aid navigation at Old Inlet until 1935. Even after its lantern was extinguished for the last time, however, it served as a radio tower during World War II. Today Old Baldy stands like a lone sentinel guarding the mouth of the Cape Fear River. As North Carolina’s oldest extant lighthouse, it is one of the more popular tourist attractions along the Cape Fear coast and draws thousands of visitors each year.¹²



Confederate bugler at Fort Fisher in 1961: Forts Holmes and Caswell guarded Old Inlet at the mouth of the Cape Fear while Fort Fisher on Federal Point guarded New Inlet, entrance to many blockade runners during the War Between the States.
Photography by Bruce Roberts

See photos on pages 10-11

Keeper's Dinner Weekend 2008: Lighthouses & Friendship

Thank you to the many donors of raffle/auction items. Dick Ryder of the USLSSHA who donated a USLHS grave marker replica to the OBLHS auction. If you would like to have one of these markers, please contact us at info@outerbankslighthousesociety.org. And thank you to Deb Hildebrandt of ND! She continues to donate from her extensive lighthouse/maritime collection as a fundraiser for OBLHS. Kevin Duffus and the Roberts donated books; Theresa Ward made one of her gorgeous handmade quilts, Rick Ward built an awesome replica of Old Baldy Lighthouse complete with solar light; Judy Moon donated her handmade purse and hand painted necklace and so many others gave of their time and talents including Bob and Nicole DaVia. Bett Padgett did the planning and Diana Chappell set up the Keeper's Store (and did a million other things) with help from Janice Thomas. We've missed names, to be sure, but know that your efforts have contributed to the lighthouses of North Carolina.

Footnotes for "A Brief History of Bald Head Lighthouses" by Dr. Chris Fonvielle, Jr.

- ¹ Fort Caswell Logbook, February 1, 1863, Special Collections, Randall Library, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.
- ² Cooper, Arthur W. *Smith Island and the Cape Fear Peninsula* (Raleigh: Wildlife Preserves, 1964).
- ³ Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr., *Historic Wilmington & the Lower Cape Fear: An Illustrated History* (San Antonio, Texas: Historical Publishing Network, 2007), p. 15 (hereafter cited as Fonvielle, *Historic Wilmington & the Lower Cape Fear*).
- ⁴ David Stick, *Bald Head: A History of Smith Island and Cape Fear* (Wendell, North Carolina: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1985), p. 30 (hereafter cited as Stick, *Bald Head*).
- ⁵ Alan D. Watson, "Benjamin Smith and the Lighthouse Tradition on Bald Head," *North Carolina Historic Preservation Office Newsletter* (Spring 1990).
- ⁶ Stick, *Bald Head*, p. 32; Alan D. Watson to Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr., October 25, 2008; *Wilmington Chronicle*, July 31, 1795.
- ⁷ Stick, *Bald Head*, pp. 33-34, 37.
- ⁸ Stick, *Bald Head*, p. 37; Expenditures—Light-Houses, &c., Letter From the Secretary of the Treasury, March 19, 1842, 27th Congress, 2nd Session, Ho. Of Reps., Doc. No. 140, pp. 81, 108-109; List of the Lights of the United States on the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific Coasts, Corrected to January 1, 1861; Sarah Bahnson Chapman (ed.) *Bright and Gloomy Days: The Civil War Correspondence of Captain Charles Frederic Bahnson, a Moravian Confederate* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp. 149-150.
- ⁹ Fonvielle, *Historic Wilmington & the Lower Cape Fear*, p. 33
- ¹⁰ John Wilkinson, *The Narrative of a Blockade-Runner* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1877), p. 197 (hereafter cited as Wilkinson, *The Narrative of a Blockade-Runner*); List of the Lights of the United States on the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific Coasts, Corrected to January 1, 1861; Superintendent of Lights at Wilmington to James G. Martin, November 23, 1861, Confederate Lighthouse Research Report from Sandy Clunies to Bruce Roberts, August 1999.
- ¹¹ Mallory to Wilkinson, March 11, 1864, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 volumes (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. 51, pp. 834-835 (hereafter cited as ORA); Wilkinson, *The Narrative of a Blockade-Runner*, p. 197; Lee to Welles, May 11, 1864, ORA 36, part 2, p. 651.
- ¹² Stick, *Bald Head*, pp. 71, 78.

Dr. Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr. is an assistant professor in the Department of History at UNC Wilmington. He would like to thank his colleague Dr. Alan D. Watson for reviewing this article.

Continued from page 1

structural and safety upgrades to the lighthouse were completed. Examples of safety concerns include: sagging steps, the lack of good lighting and inside handrails on the stairs, a difficult opening to the gallery, and an inadequate railing around the gallery. Superintendent Russel J. Wilson reports that this summer the seashore took several significant steps towards opening the lighthouse to regular public access, including a comprehensive engineering evaluation and preparation of designs for the modifications that are necessary to the lighthouse to ensure public safety. These projects will also generate cost estimates for the project and will be the first steps towards generating funding for the renovations.

"The Cape Lookout Lighthouse Historical Structure Report is almost completed and construction documents for structural repairs to the Lighthouse will soon be drafted," announced Russ Wilson, Supt. Cape Lookout National Seashore.

Used with permission from nps.gov/cal

From the Keeper's Son

John Gaskill Remembers

John Gaskill grew up at the Bodie Island Lighthouse. You might recall his family's story in *Lighthouse Families* by Shelton-Roberts/Roberts. John volunteers at the lighthouse every Tuesday and Thursday during the summer/fall seasons and greets visitors who want to hear his stories about his dad, Vernon Gaskill, Sr., Principal Keeper at Bodie Island from 1919 until the U.S. Coast Guard assumed responsibilities for American lighthouses in 1939. Visitors return just to talk with John who is 93-years—a living legend. Now you can read his absorbing autobiography in his book *John Gaskill Remembers*. He takes us all over the world during his youth at Bodie Island, Navy career, Supt. of Ferries for NC, real estate adventures, and much more. You can find the book at the Bodie Island Light Station visitor center, Manteo Booksellers (252) 473-1221, and History Island in the Christmas Shop (cheryl@ec.rr.com). \$16.95 plus shipping.

Time Line of the Cape Lookout Light Station

- 1804 - Congress authorized a lighthouse at Cape Lookout.
- 1810 - Specifications for construction and request for bids appeared in the Boston Patriot.
- 1811 - Contract awarded to Ben Beal Jr., Duncan Thaxter, James Stephenson of Boston.
- 1812 - The 1st Cape Lookout Lighthouse completed and lighted. It was a brick tower inside a wood frame with the light 104 feet above sea level. President James Madison appointed James Fulford the first keeper at a salary of \$300 per year.
- 1845 - Red and white stripes were painted on the wood frame structure to make it more visible in the daytime. Captains reported difficulty seeing the light provided by the 13 whale oil lamps with 21-inch metal reflectors.
- 1851 - Lighthouse was in need of serious repairs, moving sand built up against keeper's house, complaints from seafarers mounted.
- 1852 - Congress put lighthouses under new Light-House Board replacing the administration of the Fifth Auditor of the Treasury.
- 1856 - State-of-the-art 1st order Fresnel lens installed in old tower.
- 1857 - In 1857 Congress appropriated \$45,000 to build a new lighthouse.
- 1859 - New tower completed. The 1st order Fresnel lens was moved into the 150-foot-brick tower and lighted for the first time on Nov 1 (see official lighting announcement by the U.S. Light-House Board on back page). The 1812 tower was left standing as a daymark.
- 1861 - Confederates, acting on orders of the Confederate Light House Bureau, carefully removed the 1st order Fresnel and took it to the state capitol in Raleigh for safekeeping.



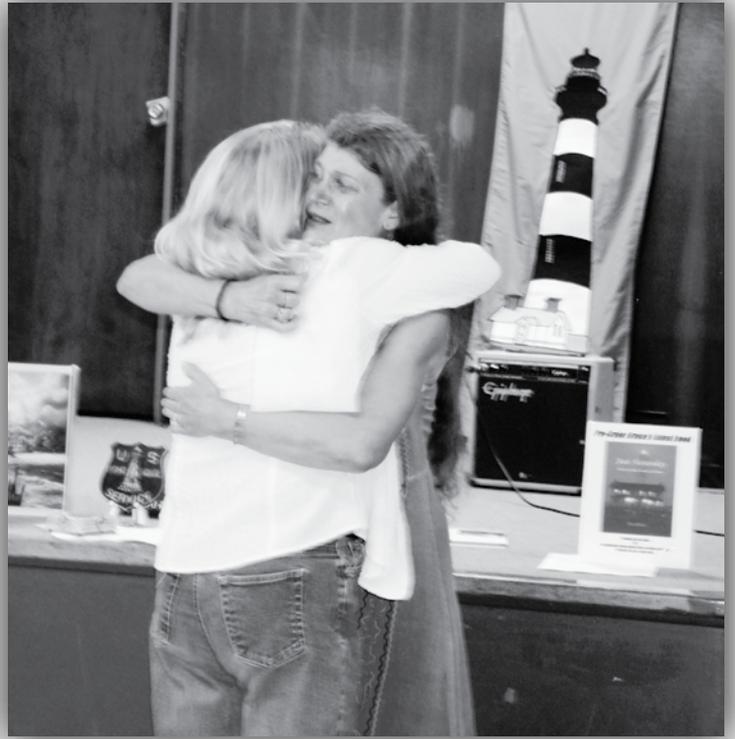
- 1863 - After Union forces retook the area, a smaller 3rd order Fresnel lenses was installed.
- 1864 - Confederate raiding party blows away part of the wood stairs in new tower, but the Fresnel lens survived and the light was put back into service by Union Lighthouse Inspector Jeremy Smith.
- 1867 - 1st order Fresnel was re-installed after being repaired in France. Wooden stairs were replaced with cast iron stairs (like the one at Cape Hatteras)..
- 1870 - Kerosene lamps were introduced in American lighthouses and later became the fuel used in the lamp at Cape Lookout.
- 1873 - The tower was painted with its distinctive diagonal black and white checker (diamond) pattern. New keepers' quarters was completed. The building is still standing today and serves as a visitor's center, and exhibit area. Volunteer resident keepers live in the house seasonally.
- 1879 - The last year the old tower appeared on the official light list as a daymark.
- 1914 - The light was changed from a fixed white to flashing—a panel revolved on the outside of the lens.
- 1939 - The U.S. Coast Guard took over from the civilian Lighthouse Service.
- 1950 - The lighthouse was automated and keepers were no longer needed.
- 1966 - Cape Lookout National Seashore established, light still owned and maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- 1972 - (October 18) - Lighthouse station including tower, keepers' quarters, oil house, coal shed, and summer kitchen listed on National Register of Historic Places.
- 1975 - (circa) Cape Lookout 1st order Fresnel lens removed and stored at U.S. Coast Guard Center in Portsmouth, VA.
- 1978 - (November 29) - Portsmouth Village also listed on National Register.
- 1989 - (February 1) - U.S. Coast Guard Station complex at Cape, including station, galley, equipment building ("garage" with large doors), cisterns, etc. listed on National Register of Historic Places.
- 1994 - U.S. Coast Guard transferred the 1st order Cape Lookout Fresnel from to the relocated Block Island Southeast Light in Rhode Island, relighted in October..
- 2000 - (June 30) - Cape Lookout Historic District (runs approximately from lighthouse to Coast Guard Station) listed on National Register of Historic Places
- 2003 - Cape Lookout Lighthouse ownership transferred to the National Park Service. Lighthouse appeared on U.S. postage stamp as one of the five Southeastern Lighthouses series.
- 2006 - Efforts renewed to reclaim Cape Lookout's 1st order lens, ongoing since 1995 but yet to be resolved.
- 2007 - (November 3) Cape Lookout Lighthouse opened the last time for climbing for one day on Saturday to commemorate the anniversary of lighting the lighthouse in 1859.
- 2008 - (February 23) NPS announced tours of the Cape Lookout Lighthouse were suspended for public safety reasons due to deterioration to the integrity of the tower's circular stairway. Plans for restoration continue.
- 2009 - (October 10) Celebration of the 1859 light's 150th birthday

Timeline © 2008 Cheryl Shelton-Roberts

Calling all OBLHS members to attend and volunteer for this special October weekend at Cape Lookout. For more information, contact Cape Lookout National Seashore Volunteers In the Park coordinator Richard Meissner at (252) 728-2250 or email Richard_Meissner@partner.nps.gov.



Above left is Bill Padgett at the top of Old Baldy. His smile says it all.



Above right Bett Padgett carries out one of OBLHS's most important goals: recognition of those who go above and beyond the call of duty for American lighthouses and service to visitors who travel from afar to visit them.

Below, left, Kim Gottshall heads up a group climbing Oak Island Lighthouse—the best aerobics on the East Coast. At right, you can see the steps are almost vertical.



An event on Oak Island, Bald Head Island, Southport

All photographs by Diana Chappell

Below is Jim McKee, aka "Dunbar Davis." Jim is in costume as the former Keeper of the Oak Island Life-Saving Station; he spoke to our group at a luncheon (bottom left) near the Old Baldy Lighthouse of the grueling rescues that required superhuman strength and determination from all surfmen.



Diana Chappell, Cheryl Shelton-Roberts, and Janice Thomas hang on in the brisk winds atop the Oak Island Lighthouse. At times during the weekend, we had to don our rain gear and hold onto our hats. But, the rougher the weather, the more these lighthouse enthusiasts like it!

Below is Ann Mills, Executive Director of the Old Baldy Foundation. Ann was recognized with a President's Award for her tireless work for Old Baldy Lighthouse.



Bett Padgett recognizes Courtney Whisler for her years of help for OBLHS from collating the first editions of the newsletter over a decade ago to playing "Vanna White" at every year's auction. Our "kids" are the future to lighthouse preservation.





LIGHTHOUSE UPDATE

Updates on the area lighthouse events & schedules

Lighthouse Updates

Vol. XIV no. 4 Winter 2008

<http://www.outbankslighthousesociety.org>
E-mail info@outbankslighthousesociety.org



Currituck Beach Lighthouse is owned by the Outer Banks Conservationists, Inc. and is open from 9:00 a.m. until 5 p.m. daily until the weekend after Thanksgiving, and will be closed Thanksgiving Day. The winter months will be spent working on digitization and archive database projects as well as doing more mortar testing of the lighthouse for future restoration. Visitation to the lighthouse was up 6% last year, which is testimony to our lighthouses' popularity and value in today's market. The lighthouse will reopen April 6, 2009.

Roanoke Marshes Lighthouse (reproduction), located in Manteo, is an exterior reproduction of an 1877 screwpile light that was originally located near Wanchese. It is open from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday with exhibits free of charge. The lighthouse is located on Manteo's attractive waterfront near the Maritime Museum, open daily free of charge from 9:00 a.m. until 5 p.m. year-round; both are operated by the Roanoke Island Festival Park.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore's visitor centers are open year-round 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., mid-June through Labor Day and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. the rest of the year. For more information call (252) 441-5711.

Bodie Island Light Station grounds are open year-round. Jeld-Wen announced October 29th the winner of the lighthouse initiative is New Canal Lighthouse in Louisiana which was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The company determined that New Canal was more in need of immediate help. Although Bodie Island Lighthouse is not the winner of the Jeld-Wen Initiative, it is a winner in that it received tremendous attention from people around the United States for its need of restoration. It was a difficult decision for Jeld-Wen as each of these lighthouses is special and deserves restoration. It's good that they all received recognition. The Andersen Window Company has offered to make window replicas for Bodie Island Lighthouse and Cape Hatteras National Seashore is investigating this possibility. The first set of the spiral staircase was removed in late October to be sent for making a cast and to determine the strength of the steps. This is the first phase of repairing the trod-worn rusting steps. The U.S. Congress passed the President's request for a temporary continuing resolution which means that the fiscal year 2009 budget will not be voted on until the spring of 2009. We'll keep you posted.

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse will re-open for climbing mid-April, '09. For information about climbing visit: <http://www.nps.gov/caha/planyourvisit/climbing-the-cape-hatteras-lighthouse.htm>. It was anticipated that the lighthouse was to be painted in 2007, but weather prevented it. It got its new spiral stripes in late October/early November this year.

Little Kinnakeet Life-Saving Station got a new roof in October. A 75-foot beam was required and was shipped from Washington State.

Ocracoke Lighthouse grounds are open year-round. At the keepers' quarters, crews will replace rotted wood, replace the roof with a metal roof, and install gutters and paint. All work will be completed by December 14th.

Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station is located in Rodanthe, just north of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse at milepost 39.5. Experimental hours of operation are 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. daily until November 28. Call in advance 252-987-1552 if you plan to visit to make sure someone is there during the cooler season.

Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum located at the end of Hwy 12 on Hatteras Island is now owned and operated by the state of North Carolina. Fall hours are Mon-Fri, 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Winter hours may change, call ahead at (252) 986-2995 Visitation is free; donations are appreciated.

Cape Lookout Lighthouse is part of the Cape Lookout National Seashore. Park headquarters and the visitor center are located on Harkers Island featuring displays and a discovery room for young visitors. On Core Sound Banks Island at the light station, the new Keepers' Quarters Museum has opened to the public. The facilities at the Lighthouse (Visitor Center, Keepers' Quarters Museum, bathrooms) will close on Monday, November 24 and reopen in April '09. The facilities at Portsmouth will close on November 16 and re-open in April. Park headquarters at Harkers Island is open every day 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. except Christmas and New Years days. The grounds are open year-round.

Oak Island Lighthouse is owned by the Town of Caswell Beach with ongoing cooperative efforts with the Friends of Oak Island Lighthouse (FOIL). Seasonal tours of the lighthouse have been completed by may be arranged by appointment. Please check <http://www.oakislandlighthouse.org> for details. They have completed the implementation of the lighthouse site plan for improvement for parking and navigation to the lighthouse as well as landscaping. Our group enjoyed the hospitality of the Friends of Oak Island and made a donation in thanks for the opportunity to climb the tower.



LIGHTHOUSE UPDATE

Updates on the area lighthouse events & schedules

Price's Creek Front Range Light (1850 ruins) is not open for public visitation but you can get a good look at this pre-Civil War tower, the only river light still in its original location, from the Southport-Ft. Fisher ferry.

Old Baldy Lighthouse & Smith Island The Old Baldy Foundation owns, maintains, and staffs this historic lighthouse. Fall hours are: Tues-Sat 10:00 a.m. until 4 p.m.; Sunday 11-4; Closed Mondays. Winter hours are: December 1, 2008 - March 16, 2009 Friday and Saturday 10-4; Sunday 11-4; Closed Mondays-Thursdays. Call for hours during the holidays: 910-457-7481.

Roanoke River Lighthouse (reproduction) is located on the town of Plymouth's beautiful waterfront about halfway between the northern and southern Outer Banks. They are working on furnishing the lighthouse with period furnishings and have recently acquired a USLHS caretaker's box from one of the original NC river lights. Hours of Operation: 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Tuesday thru Saturday and by appointment. Call (252) 217-2204 to arrange a group visit. Visit <http://www.roanokeriverlighthouse.org/>

General correspondence to OBLHS should be addressed to P.O. Box 1005, Morehead City, NC 28557

Membership correspondence and donations: Bob DaVia, OBLHS Membership Chair, P.O. Box 2141, Winterville, NC 28590. Donations and Membership can also be obtained online at <http://www.outerbankslighthousesociety.org/join-reg-form-intro> through Pay Pal. Also, visit our Keepers' Store while you are there! We have a number of new items coming online soon!

Do you have a new email address? Please send it to info@outerbankslighthousesociety.org and please update your information when using your return envelope. Check the date on your address label to determine your renewal date.

Are you a Cape Lookout Lighthouse Keeper's direct descendant? (i.e. son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, great-grandson and their spouses.) Please send your name, address, phone number, and name of your relative keeper to OBLHS at P.O. Box 1005, Morehead City, NC, 28557. E-mail cheryl@ec.rr.com or call (252) 247-5436. You may also contact Sandra McLean Clunies, our certified genealogist, with information: sandy@clunies.net

Thank you to Bett Padgett for the above updates, and thank you to Bett and Virginia Howell for website updates.

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Thank you to all our members and friends. A donation in honor of Audrey B. Conner, Frisco, NC, has been made by Emy and Bob Shock of Paoli, PA.

2008 Raffle Winners!

1st Prize: B&B weekend at the White Doe Inn, Cheryl Kirsten, Leesburg, VA

2nd Prize: Week at Nags Head Cottage, Keith Duke, Ellicott City, MD

3rd Prize: Signed OBX Book Collection, John Campbell Havre de Grace, MD

4th Prize: Handmade quilt, Jim & Mabry O'Donnell Marietta, OH

Congratulations to all! Thank you to everyone who sold raffle tickets—and bought them! Every dollar will be put to good use. Thank you to all our members and friends for your support.

The Outer Banks Travels to the Chesapeake Bay

By Diana Chappell

At the 2007 Keeper's Weekend Auction, Henry Gonzalez of the Thomas Point Shoals Lighthouse partnership donated a prize of a "private tour of the lighthouse" for a small group. Several members banded together to win the trip. The trip was scheduled for Sat., Sept 6th of this year. The trip didn't go off as planned due to Tropical Storm Hannah's visit to the East Coast. Although most of the participants slogged through the rains to get to Annapolis, the trip had to be postponed until Sunday (and we lost a few participants due to travel conditions). The morning dawned with clear-blue skies and a gentle, warm breeze. Henry and his wife Chris expanded the trip to include a tour of Annapolis MD, from the water and a visit and tour of the privately owned Baltimore Harbor Lighthouse (a caisson style lighthouse). We also saw Sandy Point Lighthouse as we cruised past on our way from Thomas Point to the Baltimore Harbor.

Everyone on the trip agrees that this was a once-in-a-lifetime trip! We had fabulous weather (as seen in the picture), extensive, personal interior tours of Thomas Point and Baltimore Lighthouses—and special friendships were made, always part of our special weekend lighthouse events together. For more information on booking your own visit to Thomas Point you can visit their website at <http://www.thomaspointlighthouse.org/tours.asp> and Baltimore Harbor at <http://www.baltimorelight.org/tours.htm>.

Pictured in back row left to right: Kelly Waller, Janice Thomas, John, Katie, and Kim Gottsball, Ron Rourk, and Brenda Craig. Front row: Judy Moon, Diana Chappell, and Lyn Rourk

Picture courtesy of Diana Chappell



Letter from Outer Banks Lighthouse Society President Bett Padgett

Friends,

November, 2008

Our Keepers' Weekend in October is one time during the year when many of our members meet each other, sometimes for the first time, and sometimes for the 14th time! It is heartwarming to see so many of you enjoying the events and tours we plan and learn so many new things about our maritime history and our wonderful lighthouses. The events of our annual Keepers' weekend were tremendously successful and enjoyable. Thank you to all who participated in the events of the weekend. There were 70 people present at the awards banquet and auction! The raffle winners this year were all OBLHS members and we are so happy to reward those lucky winners who have helped us over the years look after our lighthouses. Many of the members who participate in our events come from as far away as Florida, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. Everywhere, people find different meanings in lighthouses since each of us see them in a very special and unique way.

For many this is the time of year to remember our loved ones by donating to special causes. If you would like to help keep the lights of the lighthouses in NC burning for a particular person please consider a donation to the society. Our address is:

PO Box 1005

Morehead City, NC 28557

We all hope that this is a very enjoyable season for all of you and will be spent with family, friends and those closest to you. We appreciate your love for lighthouses everywhere and wish you a warm and wonderful holiday season!

Sincerely,

Bett Padgett, President

2008 OBLHS Keeper's Dinner Weekend on Oak Island, Bald Head Island, and in Southport was a great success. We had a blast—and learned a great deal. We started our long weekend touring the Oak Island Coast Guard Station and climbing the Oak Island Lighthouse. The Friends of Oak Island Lighthouse were great tour guides; the climb was memorable, to make an understatement. Each of us was challenged by the ship's ladder style of steps, each flight rising steeply up to each landing. The Friends were patient and encouraging to those a wee bit afraid of heights. And we all made it! On the way back down one could only marvel at the unusual effect of these steep flights of straight steps unlike the graceful circular stairs of North Carolina's other tall coastal lights. It appeared we were all in the midst of the M.C. Escher print "Relativity" with the unusual optical elusion that the eye couldn't discern who was climbing up and who was on the way back down!

Bert Felton spoke on range lights during our lunch with Gary and Judy Studer in their home, the former Oak Island Life-Saving Station. Our stay at the North Carolina Baptist Assembly at Fort Caswell, which occupies the site of a former Civil War fort, were in historic quarters along the parade grounds. Our next day's trip to Bald Head Island created great memories and made the island feel even more welcoming than ever. Ann Mills, Executive Director of the Old Baldy Foundation, took our group to view Frying Pan Shoals and the ruins of the 1903 Cape Fear Lighthouse. Thanks go to Bett Padgett, Diana Chappell, Bill Padgett, and many others for making this the best weekend event yet.

Finally, a special thank you to Gayle Keresey and Rebecca of the Federal Point Historical Preservation Society at Federal Point History Center in Carolina Beach. They gave an excellent reception and talk to our group about the lights of Federal Point, one of the most fascinating parts of NC's coastal history. These two women pulled this program together after the illness of our tour guide, Chris Suiter earlier in October. Let us take this opportunity to say that Chris will be sorely missed at the many historic places he volunteered and shared his vast knowledge including Southport's NC Maritime Museum and Old Baldy. And, again, thank you Gayle and Rebecca.

The Outer Banks Lighthouse Society is pleased to announce its Fresnel Prism Awards for 2008



Each year the Outer Banks Lighthouse Society sponsors awards to individuals within the lighthouse community who have contributed significantly to the preservation of lighthouses and their history. These awards were presented at the Annual Keeper's Dinner October 2008.

PRESIDENT'S AWARD:

Ann Mills
Courtney Whisler
Washington County Waterways Commission

FOUNDERS AWARD:

In honor of our founders Bruce and Cheryl Roberts
Rick Hardesty

CURRITUCK BEACH AWARD:

Connie Wirtz

OLD BALDY AWARD

Kim Gottshall

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE OUTER BANKS LIGHTHOUSE SOCIETY

PURPOSE OF THE OUTER BANKS LIGHTHOUSE SOCIETY

The purpose of the Outer Banks Lighthouse Society is to aid in the preservation of the lighthouses of the area and to work with the National Park Service and other agencies, both government and non-profit groups, to achieve the safe keeping of the buildings, artifacts and records of the U.S. Lighthouse Service.

The Lighthouse News is the official publication of the Outer Banks Lighthouse Society.

Editor – Cheryl Shelton-Roberts, Design-Bruce Roberts

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Email: lhsociety2@outer-banks.com or info@outerbankslighthousesociety.org or write OBLHS P.O. Box 1005 Morehead City, NC 28557

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\$10.00 Student Membership • \$25 Individual Membership
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\$30 Senior Family

Please make checks payable to OBLHS. Thank You
You will receive a brochure on NC lighthouses,
logo sticker, newsletter, and membership card.

The society operates on modest membership fees and occasional donations. If you would like to renew your membership and/or make a donation, please mail your *membership* correspondence to:

OBLHS Membership Director Bob DaVia
P.O. Box 2141
Winterville, NC 28590

General correspondence:

OBLHS
P.O. Box 1005
Morehead City, NC 28557

