



ADVOCATES FOR NORTH CAROLINA LIGHTHOUSES

# LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

DEDICATED TO THE

UNITED STATES LIGHTHOUSE ESTABLISHMENT

Volume XVIII Number 2

Summer 2012

## Summer Full Moon Tours and Nighttime Climbs Ever Popular



Full moon at Hatteras

There are exciting programs ongoing at North Carolina's lighthouses! For instance, the National Park Service is offering full moon tours of Cape Hatteras Lighthouse on July 3, August 1, August 31 (two full moons in August 2012), and September 29. As always, weather determines if each nighttime climb is feasible.

But, wait, there's *more* good news: In addition to the full moon tours, there will also be night climbs every Thursday evening during June until August 16. What a grand way to celebrate America's great lighthouse by opening it to the public not only during the day but also on several occasions at night.

Lighthouses from Cape May, New Jersey, to St. Augustine, Florida, are finding that night climbing tours are packed and it is predicted that more will be offered in the future. What are people looking for at night that cannot be had during a day climb? Let's just imagine—could it be: seeing the lighthouse by lamp light or natural moon light while climbers' shadows etch the curved walls; sensing a beautiful structure's interior enveloped in dark quietude; climbing the stairs just as a lighthouse keeper would have done while tending to a light for mariners bobbing around in a dark ocean; stepping out onto the gallery deck and watching a moon peek above the shroud of the horizon; soaking in the salt air as a rising moon throws its shimmering light to

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greet the lighthouse's spears of light. If it's any one of these imaginings, then a nighttime climb is an experience that is worth pursuing and recording.

Recent nighttime climbers remarked how spectacular the moon looks on the water. The light from the lighthouse spins and seems to go under the moon. In general, the adjective used for the experience of seeing the moonlight sparring with the beacon's light is "gorgeous." And even for other night climbs under a big sky full of sparkling stars, another word often heard after the experience is "awesome."

The National Park Service states that if you would like to be one of the lucky 60 participants on one of the night climbs at Cape Hatteras, climbers should know these things:

- Two tours will be given, one at 8:30 PM and a second at 9:30 PM on July 3 and August 1. Two tours Aug. 31, one at 7:30 PM and a second at 8:30 PM. Two tours Sept. 29, one at 7:00 PM and a second at 8:00 PM. Each tour is limited to 30 participants.
- There are no lights inside the lighthouse, which means climbers will ascend the 257 stairs using handheld flashlights. Each climber must bring one with fresh batteries. During the climb, park rangers will share stories of the arduous duties of the lighthouse keeper.
- From the watch room, visitors will be able to view the rotating beacon and learn about how it operates, past and present. This is a rare and unique experience. Outside on the lighthouse balcony (weather permitting) climbers will get a glimpse of what the lighthouse keepers of old were able to experience—seeing that beam of light reaching out to sea and the reflection of a newly risen moon on the ocean.
- Standard admissions fees: \$7 for adults, and \$3.50 for children (11 years of age and under) as well as seniors (62 and older). The lighthouse ticket booth, located at the lighthouse site, is open from 8:15 AM – 5:40 PM daily. *Tickets must be purchased in advance at the lighthouse and a sell-out is anticipated.* Full Moon Tour tickets are non-refundable although in the case of foul weather cancellation, the ticket can be exchanged for a daytime climb the following day. Do not try to call for reservations; tickets can only be purchased in person at the lighthouse.

- All participants are required to be at least 42 inches tall and *must climb the steps on their own*. If unsure, check with park rangers before purchasing your non-refundable ticket. Also keep in mind that some youngsters, although meeting height requirements, may not enjoy the dimly lit, sometimes claustrophobic environment.
- Children 11 years of age and under must be accompanied by an adult (16 years of age or older).
- For safety reasons, all participants must climb and descend with the group. No exceptions.
- Know your limitations! The lighthouse is tall, dark, often hot, humid, and can be a challenge to climb.
- For more information, check <http://www.nps.gov/caha/planyourvisit/climbing-the-cape-hatteras-lighthouse.htm> or contact Jason Ginder (252) 995-4474 x24.

*Partial information for this article was provided by Cape Hatteras National Seashore Public Affairs Specialist Cyndy Holda.*

## North Carolina Lights open for climbing and offering special programs:

### **Cape Hatteras:**

<http://www.nps.gov/caha/planyourvisit/climbing-the-cape-hatteras-lighthouse.htm>

### **Cape Lookout:**

<http://www.nps.gov/caloc>. See Lighthouse Updates this issue for more details.

### **Currituck Beach:**

<http://www.currituckbeachlight.com>

### **Old Baldy:**

<http://www.oldbaldy.org>. See Lighthouse Updates for more information.

### **Oak Island:**

<http://www.oakislandlighthouse.org>.  
See Lighthouse Updates for more information.

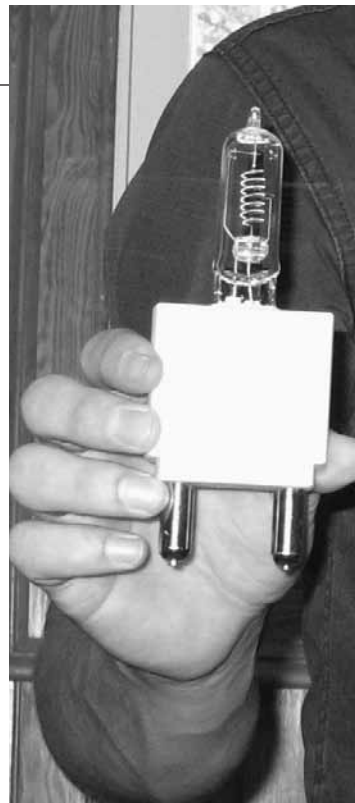
# Lighthouse UPDATES

<http://www.outerbankslighthousesociety.org>  
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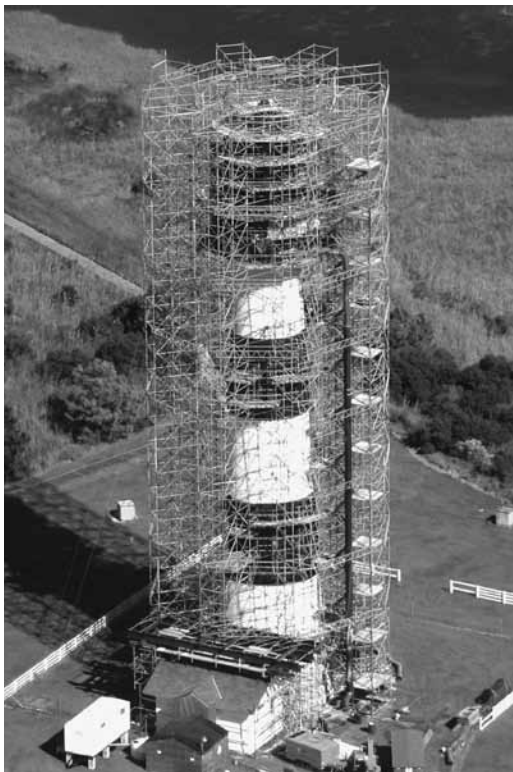
By Bett Padgett, President

**Currituck Beach Lighthouse** is owned by the Outer Banks Conservationists, Inc. The Lighthouse is open 9 AM until 5 PM; Wednesdays and Thursdays until 8 PM (weather permitting.) Climbing fees remain \$7, kids 7 and under may climb free with an adult. (<http://www.currituckbeachlight.com/>). Present-day Keeper Meghan Agresto reported that the old village schoolhouse will re-open in August as a free, public (charter) school. As in the old days of pre-twentieth century when keepers sent their children to a school here, Corolla will once again have a school with approximately 30 students. The lighthouse is receiving a modern 1,000-watt light bulb (at right). Talk about downsizing!

**Roanoke Marshes Lighthouse** (reproduction), located in Manteo, is an exterior reproduction of an 1877 screwpile light that was originally at the southern entrance of the Croatan Sound to the Pamlico Sound located near Wanchese. The lighthouse reproduction is located on Manteo's charming waterfront near the Maritime Museum. Both are operated by the Roanoke Island Festival Park. The lighthouse is open daily, free of charge from 9 AM until 5 PM year-round.



*Technological advancement in optical equipment allows a smaller bulb to give the same 1,000-watt intensity to Currituck Beach's light that works every night as an active aid to navigation. At right is the old-style 1,000-watt bulb that last burned in the Bodie Island Lighthouse. The light was turned off as Phase I of its restoration began in 2009. Photo at top left courtesy Meghan Agresto.*



*Photo courtesy of Dr. Margaret Harker*

**Cape Hatteras National Seashore (CAHA)** and its park visitor centers are open year-round, 9 AM until 6 PM mid-June through Labor Day; 9 AM until 5 PM the rest of the year. For more information call (252) 441-5711 or visit <http://www.nps.gov/caha/>. Dean Mark has been chosen as the new Administrative Officer. OBLHS congratulates Supt. Mike Murray on his retirement in July.

**Bodie Island Lighthouse grounds** are open year-round. Work to complete the lighthouse restoration began in March. The scaffolding is being reconstructed so that the new iron pieces can be installed. Work on the tower will be completed by Spring 2013 at which time, the lighthouse will open to the public for climbing for the first time in history. **Plans for a homecoming for Bodie Island Lighthouse Keepers' direct descendants** will resume this October with a mid-October 2013 homecoming date in mind. If you are interested in helping or if you are a direct descendant of a Bodie Island Lighthouse keeper, contact Cheryl at (252) 247-5436 or email [cheryl@ec.rr.com](mailto:cheryl@ec.rr.com). If you would like to register as a direct descendant of a Bodie Island Lighthouse keeper, go to <http://www.outerbanks.com/bodieislandhomecoming/>. A direct descendant includes son/daughter, grandson/granddaughter, etc. Each step of registration is self-explanatory and the form is savable/printable and can be emailed. If you have any problems, contact Cheryl. A basic fee will be charged each registrant to help cover

*Continued on page 4*



costs, and that information will be available as the event draws closer. Please let Cheryl know if you are willing to be your family group's representative to help with communication with your keeper-relatives.

**Bodie Island Coast Guard Station and Life-Saving Station** have successfully been relocated. The life-saving station will be used as a ranger station; Fish and Wildlife to use the USCG station.

**Little Kinnakeet Life-Saving-Station** has had all exterior work renewed. Interior restoration has been put on hold as it has been placed under a historic leasing program where it can be rented for 50 years if the work is completed by the new tenants. The Hatteras Island Genealogical Preservation Society is currently working towards obtaining the lease.

**Cape Hatteras Lighthouse** is open for climbing. Tickets are required; please visit <http://www.nps.gov/caba/planyourvisit/climbing-the-cape-hatteras-lighthouse.htm> for more information. Restoration of ironwork on the tower has been postponed until after the opening of Bodie Island Lighthouse. Cape Hatteras will need several areas of metal replaced within the next three years; funding has been requested in FY 2014 budget. The plan is to open Bodie Island for climbing in 2013 and then complete the work at Cape Hatteras during Oct.–April into 2014. There are also plans for a new glass-component lens to be fabricated and installed in the lantern room that will be an exact copy of the original first-order lens. What remains of the original lens is on display at the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum.

**Ocracoke Lighthouse** is open if volunteers are present for the summer season at ground level only. The Cape Hatteras National Seashore desires to purchase additional parking area. Alonzo, a Corolla stallion (at right), has been added to the herd of wild horses. A handsome little fellow, he will help the Ocracoke herd to expand and remain healthy.

**Chicamacomico Life-Saving-Station** is located in Rodanthe at milepost 39.5, just north of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. The historic opened April 12: Monday through Friday, 10 AM until 5 PM. Exciting programs are offered at 2 p.m. Monday–Friday from June through August. This historic site has seven acres representing the United States Life-Saving Service (USLSS) with eight original buildings. The oldest dates to 1874 and the newest is the Main Station built in 1911. Check their website to learn more: [http://](http://www.chicamacomico.net)

[www.chicamacomico.net](http://www.chicamacomico.net). OBLHS recently made a significant donation for summer operational expenses to keep this unique, historic site open to the public.

**Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum** is located at the end of Hwy 12 on Hatteras Island near the ferry landing and is now owned and operated by the state of North Carolina. It is open Monday–Friday, 10 AM until 4 PM and is open Saturdays during the summer. Visitation is free but donations are appreciated. <http://www.graveyardoftheatlantic.com/index.htm>

**Cape Lookout Lighthouse** is part of the Cape Lookout National Seashore. **Park headquarters** and the visitor center are located on Harkers Island and are open every day 9 AM until 5 PM except Christmas and New Years days. The grounds are open year-round. Visit <http://www.nps.gov/calol/> or call (252) 728-2250. On Core Banks island across Core Sound from park headquarters are the Keepers' Quarters Museum and facilities at the **Lighthouse** (Visitor Center, Keepers' Quarters Museum, and bathrooms) which are open from April through November 9



*Alonzo, a young Corolla stallion, now resides with Ocracoke's wild horses.*  
Photo courtesy of the NPS.

AM until 5 PM. To the north at the tip of the park is the Cape Lookout Lighthouse is open for climbing Wednesdays through Saturdays from 10 AM until 3 PM. The last day for climbing this year will be September 22, 2012. Tickets may be reserved for climbing by calling (252) 728-0708 from 9:30 AM until 3 PM. Tuesday through Friday. (Limit of 5 reservations per call). Reservations can be made for dates within the same week only. Reservations are highly recommended. A fee of \$8 is charged adults, \$4.00 for senior citizens and children under 12 years of age; tickets will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis on the day of the climb. Tickets will indicate the specific

time of the climb. Take insect repellent, sunscreen, and snacks. The island is undeveloped with no stores or restaurants. Ferries are available at various points along Harkers Island. **Portsmouth Village Visitor Center** is open from April through November (hours vary) and can be reached via passenger ferry at Ocracoke.

**Oak Island Lighthouse** is owned by the Town of Caswell Beach with ongoing cooperative efforts with the Friends of Oak Island Lighthouse (FOIL). Free public weekly tours to the second level (12 steps up) are available every Wednesday and Saturday from 10 AM until noon. Volunteers conduct tours to the top year-round with at least 2 weeks' notice. A request to climb can be made at their web site, <http://www.oakislandlighthouse.org>. Reservations are required on the regular tour days. Children must be 7 years-old to climb.

**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 in NC still in its original location, from the Southport–Ft. Fisher ferry. OBLHS plans to visit Price's Creek Lighthouse in October during our annual Keepers' Weekend. See back page for details.

**Old Baldy Lighthouse & Smith Island Visitor Center** (at top right) is owned and maintained by the Old Baldy Foundation (OBF). This historic Lighthouse is open for climbing Mon.–Sat. 9 AM until 5 PM. and Sunday 11 AM until 5 PM. Admission is \$5 for adults; \$3 ages 3–12, under 3 free. They have added a self-guided cell phone tour available on the lighthouse grounds. Guests call a local phone number from their cell phone and listen to stories about the history of the lighthouse and the island. Bald Head Island is accessible by passenger ferry from Deep Point Marina, 1301 Ferry Rd., Southport, NC. **OBF is planning a new museum and lens display building;** donations for the project are welcome and can be made at <http://www.oldbaldy.org/> where lots of info on the lighthouse and OBF's projects can be found. Be sure to join in the raucous fun August 3, 4, and 5 when the island is overrun with pirates. The "Pirates Are Coming" event has grown in popularity! Event Tickets are now on sale at the Old Baldy Gift Shop: (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 off Highway 64. Hours of operation are 11 AM until 3 PM. Mon.–Sat. and by appointment. Call (252) 217-2204 to arrange a group visit. More information is at <http://www.roanokeriverlighthouse.org/>. The lighthouse and museum are projects of the Washington County Waterways Commission. The Commission is working with the Edenton Historical Commission on a brochure about the two lighthouses and the roles they both played in history.

**1886 Roanoke River Lighthouse in Edenton** was relocated to Colonial Park on Edenton's downtown waterfront and has been moved to its permanent location over the waters of Edenton Bay (above, at bottom). The lighthouse will be operated by Historic Edenton State Historic Site once restoration is complete. The Edenton Historical Commission has a continuing interest in the lighthouse and is a partner with the Department of Cultural Resources which has agreed to fund its furnishings under the guidance of the Historic Sites Curator. The plan is to furnish it as quarters for a light keeper and assistant. Once completed, guided tours will be provided for the public on a daily basis. Check out their new website: <http://www.edentonlighthouse.org>.



*Photo courtesy of Gayle Keresey.*



*Photo courtesy of Diana Chappell.*



# HERBERT BAMBER: The Extraordinary Engineer of Highland, Michigan

*By John M. Havel*

## PART I—THE MAKING OF AN ENGINEER

### INTRODUCTION

Some of the most enduring images we have of America's lighthouses are those taken by Herbert Bamber in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, in many cases, these crisp and straightforward views are the only windows to the past that we have of these towers of light in their early days.

Examining these photographs carefully, several things become evident. The first is the enormity of this project at this time in history: several years of traveling to at least sixty-eight light stations scattered across both coasts as well as the Great Lakes, many reachable with only great difficulty. Second, many of the precisely composed scenes capture the humanity of the proud keepers and their families gathered on porches, in front yards, pausing, just a moment, to be preserved for future generations.

However, the most remarkable revelation about these extraordinary historical images is that the creator was not a photographer at all, but a civil

engineer, a Supervisor of Construction. He was a practical problem-solver who analyzed the chemical nature of cements, oversaw the building of locks and dams, surveyed rivers and land, and invented an innovative scaffolding system for the building of brick towers—and yet, he will largely be remembered for the excellence of his photography.

### EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY

Herbert Bamber was born in Highland Township, Michigan in 1858, the eldest of four children. His father was Joseph S. Bamber and his mother was Sarah Ann Morse. Joseph was a sheep farmer raising prized Merino sheep and was well known for the amount of good quality wool he could shear from his flock. In 1891 the Chapman Brothers of Chicago published a Portrait and Biographical Album of Oakland County, Michigan, which provides a good snapshot of this family at the time. In their album they wrote that Joseph was one of the progressive



*Enlargement of keeper's family at Currituck Beach Light Station, Corolla, North Carolina, June 13, 1893, by Herbert Bamber.*

farmers of Highland Township, born in Lincolnshire, England in 1835, and was only four years old when he accompanied his parents across the Atlantic.

Herbert's mother, Sarah Ann Morse, was born in Michigan in 1838, and was the daughter of Noah Pomeroy Morse of Connecticut. Noah came to Michigan in 1833, and established his farm in Highland Township. He built the first floor of stone and the second floor of timber frame, giving the house a bowed-out appearance, and leading to the nickname "Noah's Ark."

Sarah Morse married Joseph Bamber in 1857 (she was nineteen and he was twenty-two) and they had four children: Herbert, Albert Morse, Mary Elizabeth, and Sherman Lincoln.

Herbert was the firstborn, on August 25, 1858. Through Herbert's journals, we learn that neither of his dear brothers would survive till adulthood. In late December 1877, Herbert writes:

*"A sad occasion this for making an entry in my long neglected journal for darling brother Sherman is no more. After being confined to the house for about two weeks by the complete loss of action his liver (the duct which conveys the bile from that organ being closed) the disease gained upon him and finally his brain became congested and yesterday forenoon death relieved from his sufferings.... How often are we reminded that we are mortals. The hand of the angel death knows no age, no rank, no state, the loved and aged the innocent and darling are called, have been called. We know not who will be called next.... The death of him whom we mourn although caused by disease was almost entirely unexpected by me, and coming so suddenly we feel the loss more keenly. I can hardly realize that I write this in a house of mourning and that tomorrow we are to perform the last sad duties we shall ever be called upon to perform for what remains of our darling little brother but so it is."*

Sherman Lincoln Bamber was seven years younger than Herbert and only twelve years old when he died.

Five years later, in 1883, Herbert is at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and brother Albert at the State Agricultural School in Lansing. Herbert notes both in February and again in May that Albert is unwell. On May 20th, he writes,

*"Albert is sick with malarial fever at Lansing and unable to return home for vacation. Mother is coming for him at Mrs. Martin's [where Herbert was boarding in Ann Arbor]."*

Unfortunately, Albert never made the journey to Mrs. Martin's, but died at the Agricultural College of typhoid fever after an illness of nearly four weeks.

Herbert's sister Mary Elizabeth married Leslie Albert Buell, a local farmer, on November 23, 1887. Soon after their marriage, Mary and Leslie moved to Minneapolis, Kansas where their only child, Herbert Joseph Buell — named after Mary's beloved brother — is born. Mary lived until 1948 when she passed away at the age of 84. Mary's granddaughter, Elizabeth Buell Baldwin, who now resides in Garret Park, Maryland, shared the photographs of Herbert for this article.



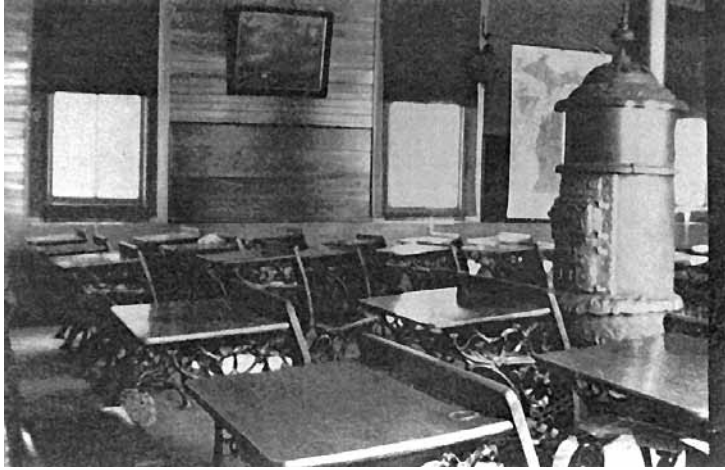
*Herbert Bamber as a young man, date unknown.*  
Photo courtesy Elizabeth Buell Baldwin



## HERBERT'S FORMATIVE YEARS

Until the eighth grade, Herbert attended the one-room West Highland schoolhouse, just over a mile from his house.

When Herbert begins his journals, he is sixteen years old and first mentions attending school on August 30, 1875. "...The Fall Term of our District School began today with Miss Atha Ruggles as teacher."



The interior of the West Highland one-room schoolhouse where Herbert attended until the 8th grade. Photo courtesy Diane Needham, HTHS

As the year turns, it is 1876, America's 100th birthday, and in the fall, Herbert receives an invitation.

*"Sep 5. Received the information that I had the privilege of taking a trip to Centennial International Exhibition."*

*"September 8: ...Father takes me to Milford and with twenty others take the 10 AM train for Detroit.... We arrive at Philadelphia and disembark at the Centennial Depot about 10 PM. The party from Milford with myself put up for the night at the Lancaster House, a temperance hotel kept by New York parties. Several... hotels were burned this evening.... Monday, September 11: Enter the exposition grounds of main building. Purchased a guide book and commence my examination of the grand show..."*

Of the eleven journals discovered, Herbert fills two complete journals with his notes on the exhibits and experiences from his eight wondrous days in Philadelphia.

In the spring of 1877, Herbert is 18, and has outgrown his District school. He begins attending the nearest "high school" in the neighboring township of Milford.

*"April 2. After finishing the Winter Term of School at home and assisting in getting up a years supply wood, I commenced this day a term of School at the Milford Union School. I am boarding with Uncle Carlos Hayes..."*

*"[June] 21st – The Spring Term of the Milford Union School closed today. And thus ended the first term of my attendance at a school other than one of our common district schools. Although I have not made the progress which I expected to make when I began the term. I found the facilities offered for study and the acquisition of knowledge much better than those of the average [sic] district school."*

*"[1878] February 25th, Monday: As father had favored my attending school at the Agri. Coll Lansing, I decided last Friday evening to visit the College and ascertain what I could in regard to the institution. And as the Spring term begins tomorrow I took the train at Howell for Lansing this forenoon at 11:50."*

The Agricultural College of the State of Michigan was established in 1855 and was the first agricultural college in the United States. At the time Herbert attended, the college did not offer a degree in engineering, and it is probable that Herbert had not yet decided on his choice of profession. (The college became Michigan State University in 1964.)

Throughout the following months, in addition to his classroom work, we find Herbert digging trenches, sharpening fence stakes, and getting an introduction to logging—standard fare for an agricultural college. Herbert enjoys his college life, he studies hard and is getting high grades throughout. However, in November he remarks:

*"My years work at College has not been as satisfactory as it might have been. I have had*



Herbert Bamber, likely in his college years. Photo courtesy Elizabeth Buell Baldwin



*a good standing in classes but for some reason or another I fail to accomplish as much as I expect to."*

In December of 1878 Herbert begins a teaching job back in Highland Township at the Lyman School, it being a common practice for college students to teach in their community. As Herbert notes in 1879,

*"About 2/3 of the Junior Class are teaching this winter, many for the first time."*

[1878] *"December 8th, Sunday: The first Monday (Nov. 25) after arriving home from Lansing I began teaching in District No. 6 of Highland. Board @ \$80 for 16 weeks.... I find that is not such a school as one might wish for. Have the names of 29 scholars on the rolls. Most of the larger scholars rather dull. Some rather disagreeable."*

He then observes,

*"I thought that my first three days teaching were the hardest three days labor I ever was called upon to perform."*

Throughout the winter and spring Herbert continues to struggle with his teaching duties. At the end of the term in March 1879 he writes,

*"My school closed Mar. 15. It was not a success in all respects. Personally I did not seem to please the people of the district."*

However, always an optimist, his next entry reads, *"Have enjoyed myself first rate the past winter"* — an unexpected comment after his disappointing teaching experience.

Back at college Herbert joins a fraternity and is elected President of the Class of '81, but by October 1879 Herbert is back home teaching again.

*"Friday I engaged the Perry school.... I am to get \$30 per month and board."*

Perry was a small village about forty miles from Herbert's home.

After a year and a half of teaching Herbert concludes, *"I have about decided that teaching is not my forte, not the profession for which I am permanently adapted."*

In April of 1880 Herbert is stricken by an "attack of ague," the nineteenth-century term for the malarial symptoms of recurring fever, chills, and sweating.

He returns home from Lansing to recover but his condition becomes so dire that he abandons the next two terms. In the fall he talks of studying at home through the winter and taking his examinations for courses he missed when he returns to school in the spring.

During his last term of college, in June of 1881, Herbert mentions civil engineering for the first time.

*"Vacation has come and gone. This term I am taking Constitutional Law and Civil Engineering with the seniors and Entomology with the Juniors."*

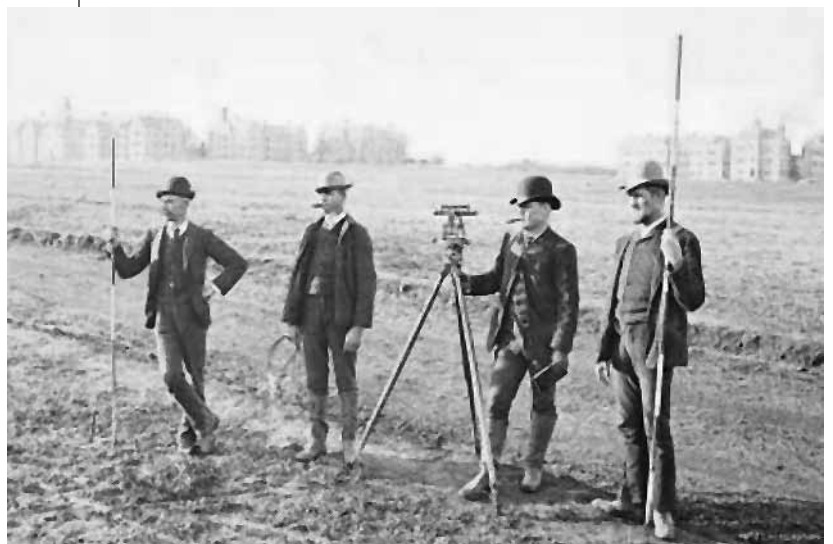
In August 1881, Herbert graduates from the State Agricultural College of Michigan with a B.S. degree.

## SURVEYING FOR THE RAILROAD

Herbert owes his first post-graduate job to a professor writing a letter on his behalf:

*"About four weeks before the end of last college term, Prof. Carpenter wrote to Frank Davis, an old graduate of the college who had charge of a RR survey, asking if he could give employment to some [students]. The week before the term closed he received a reply stating that three.... men were wanted at \$75 per month."*

*"Father and mother finally decided to be present at our class day & commencement exercises.... during*



*Typical railroad survey crew, circa 1880. Two rodmen flank the surveyor with his tripod and transit. Photo courtesy of surveyantiques.com*

*the evening they learned through Prof. Carpenter that I was intending to go to Utah on a R.R. survey.*

*"I started for Chicago on Tuesday, Aug. 30.... Our tickets cost us \$79.50. They call for first class passage to Kansas City, 3rd class the remainder of the way."*

Herbert arrives in Salt Lake City on September 8, 1881:

*"Salt Lake City—Our ride yesterday through the mountains was an enjoyable one as the day was fine. Some of the scenery was truly grand in its wild rough picturesque-ness.... At 10 this morning we take the train and as it moves southward we see for the first time the waters of Great Salt Lake. The water as we see it is of an ocean green and the shores in many places are white with the crystallized salt.*

*"We visited the Mormon tabernacle and saw the new temple in process of construction.... The walls of the new temple are of solid granite and nine ft. thick.... The vault of the tabernacle was festooned with evergreen and the room, though simple in appointments, was impressive in its simplicity and size.*

*"This morning we started for our field of labor. Took the morning train for Provo on Utah Central from thence we go to Clear Creek, present terminus town of Pleasant Valley R.R.*

*"Camped for the first time last night with nothing above me but my blankets and the blue vault of heaven."*

By February of 1882, Herbert has been surveying for the railroads in Utah for six months. He seems to enjoy the work and his journals reflect his interest in the new and different nature of this western landscape.

*"Friday, February 10th: Yesterday Palmer and I ran across a tree cut down by the beavers that was at least seven feet, eight inches in diameter where it was cut.*

*"April 2nd: A few weeks ago the Aurora Borealis made a magnificent display of color nearly 1/4 of the firmament was of a bright pink color while the remainder being already heightened the effect by its contrast. The display lasted about half an hour."*

June 6, 1882 was Herbert's last day in Salt Lake City, signifying the end of his survey work for

the railroads. Herbert, at the age of 23, had successfully completed his first employment as an engineer.

*"August 27th: In pursuance of plans formed last winter I matriculated at the University of Michigan last Thursday. My studies are in engineering and mathematics."*

One year later, in June of 1883, while at school in Ann Arbor, and shortly after his brother, Albert, died, Herbert receives a new job offer. He writes of it from Indianapolis.

## MAJOR JARED A. SMITH

*"Indianapolis, Indiana, July 5th: After Albert's death remained at home until June 11th when I returned to Ann Arbor. Found that Prof. Greene had received a letter from a Major Smith U.S.A. in charge of government work in Indiana asking for an assistant engineer and after advising me to take the position recommended me to Major Smith for it.... I wrote Major Smith accepting the position offered by him; consequently I am here this place being the location of Major Smith's office."*

*"Our work in the field will commence soon within ten days or two weeks and will be a survey of the Wabash River between Vincennes and Terra Haute."*

On July 5th Herbert writes,

*"Met Major Smith this morning. Think I shall like him."*

From July 20th on into October we follow Herbert hop-scotching from camp to camp surveying the terrain of the sixty-mile stretch of the Wabash River bordering Indiana and Illinois.

(1883) *"Sunday, October 28th: Finished our work on the river last Wednesday afternoon, i.e., having arrived at the mouth of White River we stopped work for the season.... Major Smith leads me to expect to be given charge of surveying party next season if the appropriations do not fail."*

Herbert is home for the holidays but after the New Year returns to Indianapolis. He is engaged in the meticulous drawing, inking, and production of the Wabash River survey maps, one of the many tedious



tasks of a civil engineer. In March of 1884 he writes,

*"Am still in Major Smith's office.... Had a talk with the Major about one week ago in which he gave me considerable encouragement to remain with him.... I was led to expect to take charge of the engineering this season."*

However, by August [1884] we find that circumstances have changed. Major Smith is called to Baltimore to take charge of the 5th and 6th Lighthouse Districts and Herbert accepts a position building a lock on the Monongahela River.

*"Greensboro, Pennsylvania, August 12th: About the middle of June Major Smith received orders from the Chief of Engineers to take charge of the 5th and 6th Lighthouse districts, the officer in charge, General Babcock, having been drowned. Through Mr. P's [Petitdidier's] recommendation received an offer of a position here on Lock No. 8 for the season.... As the location was healthful and the work new and promising to be instructive, I accepted."*

Although Herbert could not have known it at the time, the news about General Babcock drowning foreshadows a long and successful career working for the U.S. Light-House Establishment.

His present project, however, of building a river lock, is much more of a test of Herbert's engineering skills than the surveying and mapping he has been engaged in up to now.

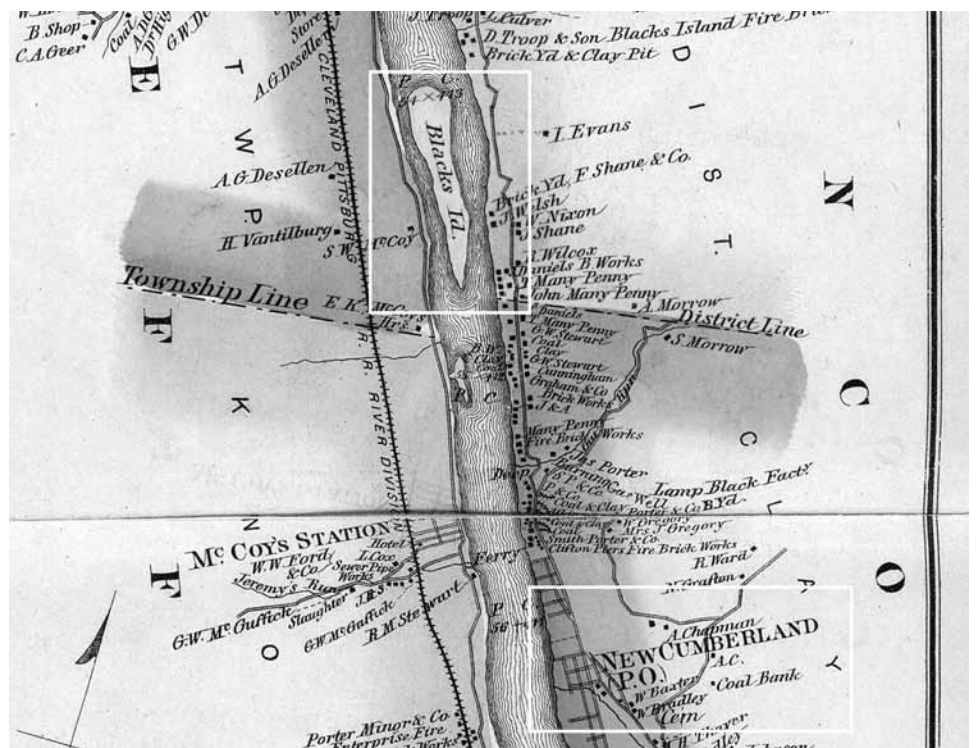
The Monongahela, Allegheny, and Ohio rivers had a long and troubled history in regard to navigation. These rivers were considered to be essential for trade and commerce, but were largely unnavigable due to the numerous shallow stretches along many miles of the rivers.

On the Monongahela, locks and dams would provide a year-round navigable channel for the 100-mile stretch downstream from Pittsburgh. Before the Civil War, six locks and dams were completed, but the war dashed all hopes of further work and its aftermath left the rivers littered with debris and wreckage.

In 1866 Congress appropriated \$55,000 to fund an immediate resumption of the projects and William Milnor Roberts, one of the most prominent civil engineers of his time, was selected to undertake the massive clean-up and renewal of the project. Roberts immediately began his survey and saw that millions of tons of coal, oil, and iron were struggling to travel hundreds of miles downriver in barges pushed by steam towboats.

He witnessed these barges, like huge floating islands, leaving Pittsburgh one behind the other, painstakingly navigating through narrow channels, round sharp bends, and between bridge piers, where a misturn of the wheel meant certain disaster. In response to this challenge Roberts deployed large snagboats and dredges and within three working seasons his efforts had greatly improved the river channel.

In 1870 Colonel William Merrill succeeded Roberts and took over the renewal of the Ohio River and its tributaries. Merrill had been first in his class at West Point and the outspoken Colonel seemed to relish lecturing Congress on its shortcomings. In 1871 he declared, "For a river one thousand miles long, with commerce estimated at over \$500,000,000, the sums lately appropriated are insignificant." With his talents and reputation, Merrill was able to shake loose more funds to complete the work started by Roberts.



Detail of an 1877 map of the Ohio River showing Blacks Island and New Cumberland, WV, where in 1885 Bamber worked for Col. William Merrill, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

But it was not until June of 1880 that Congress finally appropriated \$25,000 for Lock No. 8, 87 miles downstream from Pittsburgh and in 1881 Merrill began the construction. Bamber joined Merrill's group in August of 1884, continuing the work begun in 1881.

*"Work was well begun. The old cofferdams had been raised and pumping was commenced immediately. Now a new coffer has been built to include the lower end of the lock, two derricks are in position with their engines and considerable excavating has been done.... August 31st: Weather has been favorable for our work during the month. Our excavation now amounts to 2400 yards and stone laying has been commenced.... Colonel Merrill visited the lock this last week."*

In May of 1885, Herbert is writing from Parkersburg, West Virginia. He says he had been sick since March and still has acute pain whenever he takes a deep breath. He reports that in April he had been given the position of inspector at the Blacks Island Dam on the Ohio River, still working under Col. Merrill, and thus came to West Virginia.

The July 1885 *Official Register of the U.S., Containing a List of the Officers and Employés in the Civil, Military, and Naval Service*, lists Herbert's employment as "Inspector," employed at the "Dam at Blacks Island, Ohio River, Near New Cumberland, W. Va.," with compensation listed as "p.m. 150.00" (per month \$150.00). The project description states:

*"Improvement of the Ohio River; operating and care of Louisville and Portland Canal; improving Falls of Ohio River at Louisville, Ky.; improvement of the Monongahela and Alleghany Rivers; construction of an ice-harbor at mouth of Muskingum River, Ohio, and of harbors of refuge near Cincinnati, Ohio, and at mouth of Great Kanawha River, W. V., in charge of — Lieut. Col. William E. Merrill, Corps of Engineers."*

Although we do not see it often, Herbert's wit is occasionally evident. Regarding his new location, he writes,

*"New Cumberland is a village of about 1200 inhabitants, mostly children. It has an indefinite length but a limited breadth."*

Just one month after his arrival, on July 19, 1885, he writes,

*"Received a letter from Major Smith June 24th offering me an appointment as superintendent of construction on a Florida lighthouse. With Col. Merrill's permission, I accepted the appointment as it gave me a longer engagement than the one I have here with the same monthly salary averaging \$150 per month. Expect to leave here early in August."*

Herbert turns over his responsibilities for the dam at Blacks Island on Saturday, August 1st and by Monday morning he reports for work at the offices the 5th District in Baltimore, as the new Superintendent

### *Acknowledgments*

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Diane Needham and the Highland Township Historical Society (HTHS) of Oakland County, Michigan, for their generous sharing of the journals of Herbert Bamber.

Deep into my research, I was searching every nook and cranny on Ancestry.com for a distant relative or descendent of Bamber, hoping to find just one photograph of, or other family information on, this enigmatic figure. Then one day I had the good fortune to make contact with Ms. Needham, who shared with me the news that in 2005, HTHS had purchased eleven of Bamber's journals from a local collector. Two society members, Dick Bohl and Roscoe Smith, painstakingly transcribed the journals, which then were published in the society's newsletter from 2007 through 2010. As their society is quite small, few people outside their community were aware that these documents even existed.

The journals begin in 1876, when Herbert was 16, and tell of his life and experiences as a young man on the farmlands of Michigan, during college, at his first job as a surveyor in Utah, and of his becoming a civil engineer for the U.S. Light-House Establishment. They conclude with his assignment in Florida supervising the construction of the Mosquito Inlet lighthouse, completed in 1887. The journals have been invaluable in bringing the faintly outlined figure of Herbert Bamber into clearer focus.

I also wish to gratefully acknowledge Elizabeth (Betty) Buell Baldwin of Garrett Park, Maryland (whose grandmother was Herbert's sister, Mary Elizabeth Bamber Buell) for entrusting numerous original photographs of Herbert and his family to me for scanning and publication — finally putting a face to his name.



of Construction. It is three weeks before Herbert's 27th birthday, and this will be his first appointment working for the U.S. Light-House Establishment.

## END OF PART I

Part II will cover Herbert Bamber's career with the U.S. Light-House Establishment, including the building of the Mosquito Inlet light, and his remarkable journey photographing the lighthouses of America.

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*John Havel is a graphic designer with the U.S. EPA in Research Triangle Park, N.C. He has been fascinated by the Cape Hatteras lighthouse for many years and this study of lighthouse photographer, Herbert Bamber, is an offshoot of a larger research effort to create an accurate, photographic history and chronology of this interesting and beautiful lighthouse. He lives in Raleigh with his wife, Aida, who helps John with lighthouse research.*

*Herbert Bamber took the first picture known to date of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse in 1893. Without his images we would not have any idea as to what North Carolina light stations and keepers looked like before the turn of the twentieth century.*

*At top right is the Old Baldy Lighthouse; below is the Cape Lookout Lighthouse. Bamber was known for his preference to include keepers and their families in his images. Photos courtesy of the Outer Banks History Center.*



# A Quick Visit to Old Baldy and Area:

## *Attend the Annual Keepers' Weekend and Plan Your Visit*

by Rebecca Taylor

**H**ave you made the trip out to Old Baldy, North Carolina's oldest standing lighthouse? Given that it is located on a "private" island where no cars are allowed, the logistics can be a bit intimidating. And though you can see Old Baldy, as well as Oak Island lighthouse AND Price's Creek range light, on the horizon from the NC DOT Fort Fisher/Southport ferry (\$5.00 a car as of Summer 2012 but slated to go up in 2013), it is worth the trip to get "up close and personal" with North Carolina's oldest standing lighthouse.

### GETTING OUT THERE

Bald Head Island is reached by private ferry from the Deep Point Marina just a few hundred yards down the road from the Southport side NC DOT ferry dock. The Marina is well marked and as you turn in, you will find a vast array of parking lots, which will give you some idea of just how many home owners and visitors move on and off the island in a constant ebb and flow. Note, the parking lot closest to the ferry terminal is reserved for home owners. You will have to park out in the "cheap seats" a few minutes' walk away. You can off load those of your party who aren't up to the walk at the new terminal that works a lot like an airport with drop off and pick up zones on separate levels. Parking for a day is \$8.00. For more details see: <http://www.baldheadisland.com/AbouttheIsland/Directions.aspx>

### THE FERRY

Same day tickets for the ferry are \$23.00 for the round trip and you will receive TWO actual tickets. They WILL ask for the second one when you board the ferry for the return trip, so tuck it in a safe place. For a complete ferry schedule see <http://www.baldheadisland.com/AbouttheIsland/FerryInformation.aspx> or call 910-457-5003 for more information.

You can pretty much count on the ferry running from the mainland to the island at the top of every hour and from the island to the mainland on every half hour — except in the middle of the night. Holiday weekends during special events like Pirate Week they often run additional ferries. Since the ferry is not hauling cars, there is pretty much always room and you don't need reservations. The ride is just 25 minutes, and loading and unloading is done in a swift 5 minutes at each end.

It's amazing to watch the dock hands load luggage, surf boards, supplies, and even bikes on and off in that very brief window. There is an enclosed area on the main deck to get out of wind or rain and the ramps to the ferry are wheelchair accessible. From the ferry you will get a great view of downtown Southport, Bird Island, the Oak Island Lighthouse, Fort Caswell, and the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Don't forget to take a camera or binoculars. The last time we went we also saw dolphins.

### TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

As you approach the island you won't be able to miss Old Baldy (built in 1817) standing guard over the busy new marina. The lighthouse is about a 10 minute walk from the marina across a new wooden bridge over a wide marsh just east of the marina.

Or you can rent a golf cart from Riverside Adventure Company (<http://www.riversideadventure.com>) located just beyond the marina. Do call and make a reservation, though, as last minute rentals may not be available. A four person cart is currently \$60.00 a day (there are hourly rates, also) and an eight person cart is \$84.00 a day. Bike rentals are also available. If you want to explore the site of the old Cape Fear lighthouse, the keeper's cottages are still standing and available for vacation rentals, but the lighthouse is gone. You will need some form of transportation as it is a very long way out on the southeast tip of the island.

### OLD BALDY SITE

Whether you walk, ride, or bike, plan to spend an hour or two at the Old Baldy site (<http://www.old-baldy.org>). Current summer hours are Monday through Saturday 10-5 and Sunday 11-5. In the off season, call



(910) 457-7481 to check days open and hours of operation. Entrance is \$5.00 to visit the replica keeper's cottage which holds a small museum and then climb the light. The old brick oil house also stands on the site. There is also a well stocked gift shop with a wide array of items with lighthouse and pirate themes. At the base of the lighthouse, there are picnic tables and it's a great place to have a snack and cool off in the shade. Food is not for sale at the lighthouse, but you can purchase "to go" sandwiches, sodas, and water at the Maritime Market on the harbor near the ferry dock. Don't forget to take plenty of pictures. On a sunny day Old Baldy against the Carolina Blue Sky is truly stunning.

OR: schedule the full Bald Head Island History Tour lead by an inland historian. Tickets are \$57 for adults, \$47 for children. That sounds pricy, but each ticket includes the \$23.00 ferry passage, the \$5.00 admission to the museum and Old Baldy, as well as a \$10.00 voucher good at Mojo's restaurant on the harbor. Reservations required, call (910) 457-5003. You will also get to see the ruins of Civil War era Fort Homes and the site of the Cape Fear Lighthouse, as well as hear tales of the life-saving crewmen, blockade runners and river pilots, as well as Blackbeard, Stede Bonnet and their piratical deeds.

Staying on Bald Head Island is your chance to experience life among the 1%. In-season rentals are only by the week and prices that begin in the thousands of dollars. Captain Charlie's renovated light station cottages, which are among the smallest rentals on the island, begin around \$3,500 a week and have to be booked a year or two in advance. Off season these cottages do book by the day with nightly rates beginning around \$450. The Marsh Harbor Inn does rent by the night throughout the year with their smallest rooms beginning around \$300 a night. All rentals come with paid ferry tickets and most also come with a complimentary golf cart. For more information on Bald Head Island accommodations see <http://www.baldheadisland.com> or [www.marshharbourinn.com](http://www.marshharbourinn.com).

Luckily for the rest of us, Southport has some reasonable alternatives. Located about a 45-minute overland drive from Wilmington or 45-minute ferry ride from Fort Fisher, the hotel chains have finally found Southport. You will find a Hampton Inn, a Comfort Suites and a Wingate by Wyndham nearby, although none are downtown in the historic area. At this time there are at least seven B&B's located in the wonderful old houses near the river, including Lois Jane's Riverview Inn (<http://www.loisjanes.com>) and the Robert

Ruark Inn (<http://www.robertruarkinn.com>). The delightfully quaint and lovingly restored Riverside Motel is also an affordable option and can be booked from the Riverview Inn's web site. Within walking distance of the historic area, there is also the Inn at River Oaks, another 1950's style motel that's been lovingly refreshed and refurbished (<http://www.theinnatriveroaks.com>).

In Southport don't miss eating at The Provision Company, ([www.provisioncompany.com](http://www.provisioncompany.com)) located on the old town docks. From the outside, it looks like a disreputable fishing shack, however it is the most popular eating place in town and serves great fresh seafood on a big open-air deck where you can watch the boat traffic along the ICW and in and out of Southport's harbor. Also overlooking the water is the Cape Fear Restaurant and Lounge (<http://www.capefearrestaurant.com>). Its menu runs to the more traditional "Calabash" style fried seafood but the food is always fresh, well cooked, and plentiful. Other dining options include The Pharmacy Restaurant located on E. Moore St. which features a modern and eclectic menu or the newer Ports of Call (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ports-of-Call>) on Howe Street which features an ever changing variety of upscale items on its menu. No fast food places have invaded the historic area but there are the usual suspects on NC 133 toward Ocean Isle.

While in Southport take time to wander amid the unique gift shops, antique stores, and art galleries that now line Moore and Howe streets in the old downtown area or drive the neighborhood near the water to view the many old homes that have been lovingly restored. Or duck into the shade of the old oaks of Franklin Square Park. At the back of the park is Franklin Square Gallery, (<http://www.franklinsquaregallery.com/>) home of the Associated Artists of Southport, a non-profit organization dedicated to the cultural enrichment of the community. If you have time don't miss the newly re-located North Carolina Maritime Museum at Southport (<http://www.ncmaritimemuseums.com/southport.html>) currently open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 AM – 5 PM. Or wander through the old Smithville Burying Ground (<http://www.southporttimes.com/featured/2007093001.html>) east of town where there is a memorial to Benjamin Smith, Continental Army officer, North Carolina Governor, and original owner of Bald Head Island.

*Rebecca Taylor is a retired librarian and a lifelong reader of travel and adventure stories. She now writes, both fiction and nonfiction, collects lighthouses, and plans her next lighthouse trip: MICHIGAN!*

# OBLHS Annual Keeper's Dinner and Weekend October 5th–7th 2012

We will explore the Cape Fear region and learn about the lost lights of the area. We will enjoy a “beach experience” by staying in Carolina Beach. We plan to visit Price’s Creek Front Range Light as well as the site of the Federal Point Lighthouse. We will learn about recent archaeological findings at Federal Point and learn of the lighthouses of the area. ***Our annual Keepers’ Dinner and Awards will be aboard a cruise ship Friday, October 5th, with guided narration from Leslie Bright, former chair of the Federal Point Historical Preservation Society.*** We will enjoy presentations at the Society’s building in Carolina Beach as well as a picnic lunch and entertainment. There will be activities for those who don’t wish to visit Price’s Creek Lighthouse or in the event of inclement weather preventing our visit to the site.

The Cape Fear area is famous for its many historic events that took place from Wilmington to Southport to Old Baldy. The winding Cape Fear River was harbinger of many dashing blockade runners who slipped in and out of the river’s entrance under the big guns of the Confederate Mound Battery. Home to famous leaders including W.H.C. Whiting, Col. William Lamb, and the notorious Confederate spy, Rose O’Neale Greenhow. The Civil War took its toll on all involved, especially the range lights all along the 25-mile channel of the Cape Fear leading to the Port of Wilmington. This was the Confederates’ last shining moment to save the Southern cause for states’ rights. It was the last place on the East Coast where President Lincoln’s Anaconda plan failed. This was where Whiting and Lamb drew their swords in the sand and chose to die instead of surrender to the insurmountable numbers of attacking Union soldiers. It is a sacred place of human drama and sacrifice. And, it’s a beautiful area to explore and still be able to touch the only river light still in its original position. Please join us for a special weekend with many surprises. We will keep you informed and send full details and registration form. But mark and reserve the weekend now on your calendar!

To commemorate some of the history of this great area of North Carolina, Bett Padgett wrote a song based on an interview with James Olin Coleman who related memories of his grandmother, Mary Catherine Ruark. Bett wrote her song based on Ruark’s memories of the Civil War, which included watching the battles of Fort Fisher from Price’s Creek Rear Range Light. Her father, Hanson Kelly Ruark, was lighthouse keeper at the range lights; today, only the ruins of the front range light still stands. For more information on this oral history, see <http://library.uncw.edu/web/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/315.xml>



**N**ominations for board of directors are accepted Oct– May 1 of each year. If you are interested in a position on the board please contact the chair of the Nomination Committee, Mabry O’Donnell at (740) 373-3012 or [odonnelm@marietta.edu](mailto:odonnelm@marietta.edu). Self-nominations are acceptable.

OBLHS acknowledges a donation made in memory of Martha Higgs.

We also are grateful that the late Marybruce Dowd and her mother, Dorothy Gaskill Sullivan, bequeathed requests that donations be made to OBLHS in their memory. Sadly, we report that Marybruce crossed the bar only three months before her mother this year. She was granddaughter, and Dorothy was daughter of Keeper Vernon Gaskill, Sr. at Bodie Island Lighthouse. Several donations have come to OBLHS in memory of both of these gentle women.



## *“It’s Not Safe Outside”*

Mary Catherine come here quick. It’s not safe outside  
Union soldiers coming fast and we’ve got things to hide  
We’ve got some things to hide.

Take the silver to the marsh, bury the ham there too  
Dig ‘em deep and cover ‘em good; we’ll get ‘em when  
they pass on through

We’ll dig ‘em up when they pass on through.

I’ll send a signal to the boys, our comrades dressed in  
gray

I’ll send it when the sun goes down, they won’t see in  
the light of day

They won’t see it in the light of day.

From Cape Fear through New Inlet they’ll go past  
them Yankee ships

If a blue shirt comes to question me, it’s safe upon my  
lips

It’s safe upon my lips.

To Price’s Creek, now come here, child, straight into  
the tower.

Ft. Fisher’s fightin’ the Yanks again; fightin’ with all  
their power

They’re fightin’ with all their power. They struck a  
union ship out there, you hear the cannons roar?

Cover your ears and shut your eyes, lie down upon the  
floor.

Lie down there on the floor.

Come here child, listen to your pa, if’n you know what’s  
best

The way them boys is fightin’ bad, the lighthouse  
might be next

The lighthouse might be next.

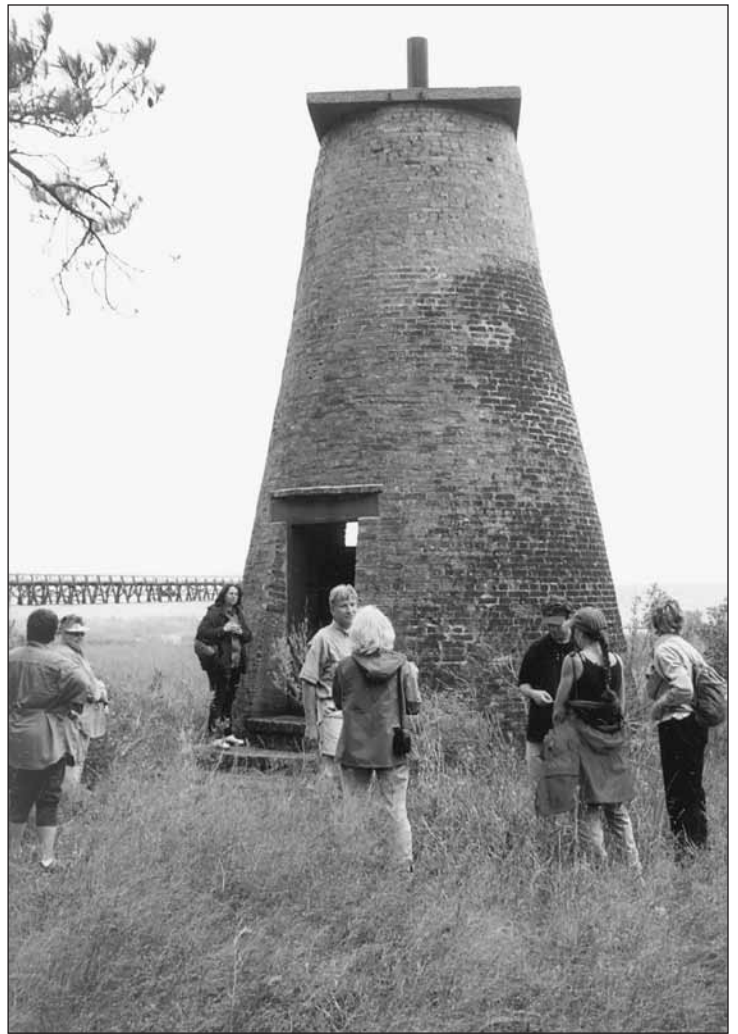
Mary Catherine, lay down low. From the Yankees here  
we’ll hide.

The Union soldiers ‘r fightin’ mean and it’s not safe  
outside

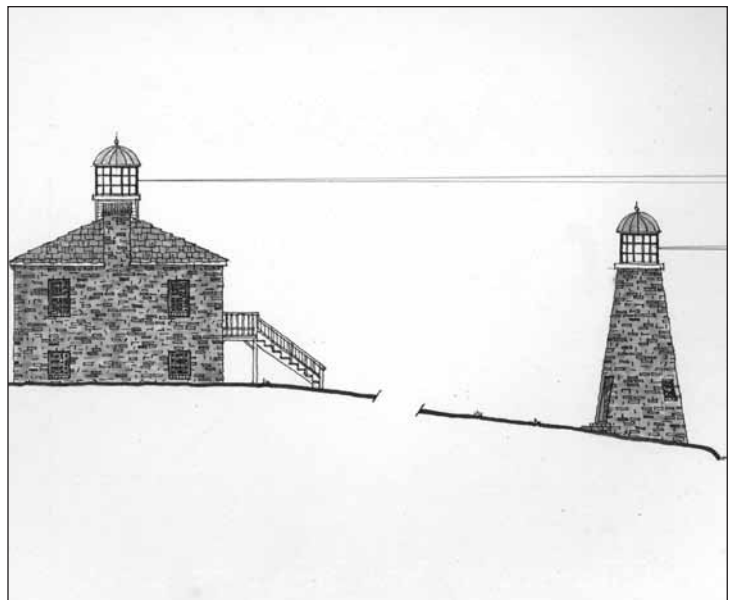
No, it’s not safe outside.

© 2012 Bett Padgett

*This is an artist’s rendition of Price’s Creek Front and Rear Range Lights when the light station was built. Meticulously following official US Lighthouse Service Light Lists, artist Brent Westwood recreated the keeper’s quarters and front range light. Mary Catherine Ruark and her keeper-father watched the battles of Ft. Fisher from their home, the keeper’s quarters, that served as the rear range light.*



*Price’s Creek is North Carolina’s only river light that resides on its original site. Depicted in Bett Padgett’s song, “It’s Not Safe Outside,” we get a glimpse of the turmoil that surrounded this otherwise peaceful setting during the War Between the States. The range lights were part of a system of signal lights for Confederate blockade runners leaving the Cape Fear River and slipping past Union blockaders on their way to England to trade cotton and pine products for arms and ammunition to support the Rebel cause.*



*The following is reminiscent of stories shared by lighthouse keepers' children.  
There was never a lack of playmates on Hatteras Island, some of them with whiskers and tails.*

# Cats, Cats, and More Cats on Hatteras Island

*By Peggy Holmes*

Our island was not short in a supply of wild cats. Daddy always said that the whole island was “overrun” with the lot of them. Hundreds and hundreds of them made their homes on our island. Now, these were *not* your average, cute and cuddly house pets — these things were *wild*. After weeks of watching them dart in and out of the swamp and running all over the island, my brother and I just had to have one for a pet. For days on end Daddy tried to explain to us that even if we could get near enough to catch one of them, you still could not make a pet out of a wild cat. But try to convince two kids that were seven- and eight-years-old of that. He finally gave in and said if we could get close enough to catch one, we could keep it. And so the hunt-and-capture was on.

Up the little dirt lane from our trailer in the village of Frisco behind what was the Dairy Bar was an old two-story, abandoned house. No one had lived in the house for many years; indeed, the old home was falling down from neglect and age. But in and all around the house lived a bunch of wild cats. We had been watching and plotting for some time now.

We asked the man who owned the property if we could go in and get one of the cats. He, like our dad, tried to explain that you just could not go in and get a cat. And like Daddy finally gave in and said, “Okay,” and wished us luck.

To us it didn’t seem that it could be all that difficult. All cats like to be picked up and cuddled, right? Wrong!! The fight was on, and a fight it was. Daddy and the owner of the house stayed to watch and make sure that we didn’t get hurt. They watched and laughed at us as we went in. Claiming our “new cat,” as it turned out, was more akin to a rodeo round-up. We chased and grabbed at anything that moved. The cats ran and darted in every possible direction. We screamed and

yelled and grabbed at tails, legs, anything. After some time we finally cornered two cats and snatched them up as they hissed and growled at us. We proudly walked out of the old house, bleeding and all scratched up, each of us carrying a defeated cat. A yellow-and-white-striped cat and a pure-black one.

Daddy followed us back to the trailer, shaking his head in utter disbelief and opened the kitchen door for us. He sat down at the kitchen table still shaking his head as he told Mama, “Well they did it.” The cats started to hiss and scratch again and we dropped them. The minute their paws hit the floor, one dove behind the stove and the other inside an open drawer. We got each cat a bowl of milk since we proud owners knew that all kitties liked milk, and then we left to go outside to play.

Daddy knew what would happen, and he simply sat there watching and waiting. Soon, our new prizes came out and lapped up all the milk, darted out the door, and headed into the swamp. Daddy told us we would probably never see them again. Wrong again!!

The next day, our prizes were back with some of their “friends,” so we gave them all some milk. We ended up with five of them. So much for the theory of you can’t make wild cats into house cats. They lived with us as part of the family for the next few years. They laid around inside the trailer during the day getting fat and lazy. Daddy had to throw them outside at nighttime, but when morning came they were all there waiting for their morning milk.

A few weeks later during a violent thunderstorm, we were sitting in our trailer with all our fat, lazy cats and we could hear just the faintest of meows. We listened and listened and kept looking at Daddy.



Finally he got up, got a flashlight and put on his raincoat and went out into the storm. A short time later he returned soaking wet. Inside his raincoat was a tiny little calico kitten. It was also soaking wet and looked like a drowned rat. We dried her off, gave her some warm milk, and she became “pet cat number six.”

Soon after “number six” came to live with us, Daddy told my brother and I that it was up to us to feed “our little family.” Since there were no grocery stores on the island that sold canned or even dry pet food during the “off season,” we had to find another way to feed them. Fishing poles and baiting hooks were not appealing to us; besides, it would take forever to catch enough fish to feed our brood. We had to think of a faster way. We hadn’t thought of the amount of food it would take to nurture our new family when we were rounding them up. But we did find a faster and much easier way to fish for them.

A hundred yards or so from our trailer was a pond. We were never allowed to play in it because the water was black and no one knew how deep it was, but it was teeming with little minnows. Six cats, so little time, and so many fish. It was just perfect we thought. The only problem was, how to get hundreds of fish out in as short time as possible? We gathered our fishing gear and went to work. The cats sat on the bank of the pond and watched.

Handfuls of stale bread or cracker — it didn’t really matter because the minnows were not picky eaters — we took Mama’s kitchen strainer and a big bucket of water and off we went. We waded out into the pond a few feet and dropped our bait into the pond. The minnows swarmed like piranhas. We

fished until the bucket was full. Behind our trailer was a six-by-six-foot slab of concrete. We would dump the bucket of minnows out onto the slab and a feeding frenzy began until every fish had been eaten. Then the cats would lay and nap in the warm sunlight. They learned real fast when it was time to eat when they saw us with the bucket walking down to the pond.

Our favorite cat was the yellow-and-white-striped cat that we had dragged out of the old house, “cat number one.” We named her “Suzanna.” Daddy had made us a seesaw using an empty cable spool that the electric company had given us. Daddy turned the spool on its side and put a two-by-twelve-inch board

down the middle to create a seesaw. When we played on it, Suzanna sat in the middle of the board and rode. If she wanted to ride and no one was around, she would jump up on the middle of the seesaw and wait patiently for someone to take her for a ride. Suzanna even knew when it was time for my brother and me to return from school every afternoon. Mama told us that Suzanna could be sound asleep on the back of the couch but suddenly she would run and meow at the door to get out and head for our meeting place. She waited for the bus to lumber by the road to the lighthouse to our little lane to drop us

off. She walked ahead of us with her tail held high and proud. She never missed a day, rain or shine. She was our faithful keeper.

I still am a cat lover. As I type this story, I have one in my lap, one wrapped around my feet, and a third is on my computer desk making it difficult for me to hit the correct keys.



*A photo of the fishy, furry, feeding frenzy.*

© 2012 Peggy Holmes

# Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station: Hatteras Island's Buried Treasure

*By James Charlet*

Following the Civil War, Americans had experienced more than enough destruction, but they kept seeing it with all the shipwrecks. They cried out to the Federal Government to do something about the costly, tragic, and frequently terrible shipwrecks that had long been taking innocent lives along our Atlantic coast. Saving shipwrecked lives was not a priority with our government with legislation lingering on representatives' desks for decades after the establishment of the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment in 1790. However, once the statistics documenting numbers of lives spent and the staggering value of cargoes lost, the unusually effective government's answer was to create the U.S. Life-Saving Service (USLSS) in 1871. Its sole purpose was rescuing souls in peril from the seas. These brave men earned international acclaim for their consistent and routine acts of valor, courage and selflessness "so that others may live."

In 1915, the Life-Saving Service was given additional missions and had its name changed to United States Coast Guard. During the 44 year history of this service, in the most horrific and dangerous storm conditions, these men responded to over 178,000 shipwreck victims in imminent danger of losing their lives, of which they saved over 177,000 souls! Their own loss of life while being guardian angels was less than one percent. But somehow America has forgotten these peaceful heroes. That is incomprehensible.

Chicamacomico is dedicated to re-establishing that incredible, enormous and very positive part of American history. It seems as if it were almost born to do that. The now "Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station Historic Site & Museum" has amassed an outstanding and unmatched list of superlatives (that will be underlined like this).

The Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station (CLSS) became the first operational U.S. Life-Saving station in North Carolina in 1874. Its richly ornate architecture set the standard for all stations built along the Atlantic and Great Lakes shore for

practically the next decade. That is a lot of influence! The spot chosen for its location is the farthest point east in the state of North Carolina. Today the mostly restored 1874 Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station is one of only two in the nation open to the public as a museum. Its stunning appearance has been photographed thousands of times and has been published innumerable times in many publications and now the web (Googling the term "Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station" now draws 36,700 entries).

The new and larger replacement station opened in 1911. Its architecture set the standard for the famous stereotypical 'Outer Banks architecture style.' Motifs of its design resonate in homes, shops and commercial buildings from Corolla to Ocracoke – and perhaps, beyond.

Now with its two life-saving stations and their outbuildings — a boathouse, tractor shed, stable/workshop, its two cookhouses, three water tanks and a cistern — the Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station Historic Site & Museum is the largest USLSS complex in North Carolina and quite probably in the nation. It is like a village within a village. More than that, all buildings are original and are on the National Register of Historic Places. There is a special feeling throughout the compound; many visitors call it spiritual. It is more like the life-savers just left, and that you are literally walking in their heroic footsteps. It is certainly not a static, lifeless ordinary museum, but rather a rare and unique piece of Americana. Its historical significance and impact reaches all across this entire nation, and much of Europe, crossing all lines of race, gender or creed, "so that others may live." History was made here that still affects us today, and is a concrete inspiration to all in the United States Coast Guard and to all who visit the site. This hallowed ground shares the same historic stature as America's most famous historic landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, Boston Light, or the Wright Brothers National Memorial.





*Photo by Bruce Roberts*

In 1915, the U.S. Life-Saving Service merged with the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service to form today's U. S. Coast Guard. Chicamacomico then served as an active Coast Guard station until 1954, when it was decommissioned. It remained abandoned and neglected until 1974, when the Chicamacomico Historical Association was formed as a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit. Restoration could not begin until 1998, when enough funds were finally available to begin the work. It continues to be an on-going process.

The two most significant superlatives have been saved for last.

The Beach Apparatus with the Breeches Buoy was one of the basic rescue methods, and the preferred one of the life-savers. In their day, all stations were required to practice this drill twice a week, every week. Chicamacomico reenacts that full drill using exact period reproductions of the equipment of the time and following the directions in the USLSS manuals of the time. This is performed every Thursday

during the summer months of June, July and August. Chicamacomico is one of only two places in the entire country to do so. But even better, it is the ONLY place where all Drill Team members are active-duty U.S. Coast Guard volunteers.

Now. THE most significant superlative: Chicamacomico was the scene of the most highly awarded maritime rescue in the entire history of our nation!

When World War One came to our shores in 1917, America was totally and completely unprepared. We had zero defense for the ultimate stealth weapon of its day, the German submarine. On August 16, 1918, just off our coast, the British tanker SS Mirlo was torpedoed at 4:00 PM by German submarine U-117, seven miles offshore almost directly opposite the Chicamacomico Station. The Mirlo was carrying a full cargo load of 6,679 TONS of gasoline and other petroleum products. Captain Williams quickly turned his ship west, trying to beach her, but he only

got two miles when there was a second explosion. The third earth-shaking explosion ripped the *Mirlo* in two, releasing her entire explosive cargo, which, as we all know, floats on top of water. It ignited. The resulting inferno was too large to describe or even to imagine. One local newspaper's headline at the time simply read "Ocean Catches On Fire." Capt. John Allen Midgett, Jr., and his five available surfmen immediately manned their Surfboat No. 1046 and tried to launch her but extremely heavy surf required additional help. It took a full 30 minutes to finally launch through the raging surf. They went out five miles and encountered only a wall of flames, literally hundreds of feet tall. One contemporary author wrote "what happened next was too implausible for any book or movie. What happened next could not have happened. Nonetheless, it did."<sup>1</sup>

The unbelievable details of what happened next are incredulous, stunning, and too lengthy to be included here. The bottom line was that Surfboat No. 1046 and its crew went through that wall of flames. The heat was so intense that it not only singed the life-savers hair and smoked their cork life vests, but it also actually blistered the paint on the boat! After enduring a 6 ½ hour hellish ordeal, and traveling a total of 28 nautical miles in Surfboat No. 1046, the gallant crew of Chicamacomico brought back alive 42 of the 51 British sailors. In his report, "Captain Johnnie" wrote, in typical lifesaver understatement "Returned to Station 11:00PM. Myself and crew very tired."

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In the late 1800s, Congress created what was to be the supreme medal for valor. It was to be the



*The famous Mirlo rescue boat at Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station in Rodanthe, NC. Photo by James Charlet*

ultimate recognition for outstanding bravery to the extraordinary degree. Consequently, the requirements were so lofty and stringent that hardly anyone ever qualified for it; eventually it was dropped. It was called The Grand Cross of the American Cross of Honor. In its 30 year reign, nationwide, only eleven were ever issued. Six of those recipients rowed together on August the 16th, 1918 in Chicamacomico's Surfboat No. 1046. That made it the most highly awarded maritime rescue in U.S. history. That very boat is still on display in Chicamacomico's 1874 Life-Saving Station. It is a testament to the Mighty Midgetts of Chicamacomico, whose sheer will, dedication, determination and commitment rose above all others in the annals of saving lives. They would not be deterred, because that is just what they were born to do.

Chicamacomico — a National Treasure, indeed... not to be overlooked or buried, again. It has recently been nominated to become a National Historic Landmark. That is the highest historic award, such as the likes of the Statue of Liberty, the Boston Light, and the Wright Brothers National Memorial.

That would finally give Chicamacomico the status, protection and security that it has always deserved. How can you help make this dream come true? Write, call or email your U.S. Senators and Representatives, since this is a national issue.

Other ways to help, of course, include making monetary donations or paying for a membership, both of which can be done right online at [www.chicamacomico.net](http://www.chicamacomico.net) or contacting by phone at (252) 987-1552. You can donate in-kind supplies such as paint, tools, or a myriad of things needed, or donate in-kind services such as painting, carpentry, plumbing, computer work, and another long list! Perhaps the best way to help is visit if you have never been and see the magic for yourself or if you have not been lately, then go back soon. And what if you have visited recently? In all of these cases, your best help is spreading the word to family, friends, neighbors and coworkers.

Yes, friends, there is a Treasure on the beach of Hatteras Island: it is called Chicamacomico.

<sup>1</sup> Ray McAlister, Hatteras Island, Keeper of the Outer Banks.

*James Charlet is Historic Site Manager at Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station Historic Site & Museum.*



# 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 and maritime history of North Carolina 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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# OBLHS 2012 Event

.....→ **October 5-7** ←.....

## *River Cruise, Tours, Keeper's Dinner & Awards*

We will begin Friday, Oct. 5, at the NC Underwater Archeological Lab at Ft. Fisher. We will hear experts speak of the dig at Federal Point Lighthouse, tour the fort, and hear about lighthouses of the area. This will be informative and guaranteed to be great fun!

- Friday eve Cape Fear River cruise; dinner, awards, raffle, and much more!
- Saturday's planned events include special guest speaker: Chris Fonvielle, UNC-W professor, will "entertain" us with area history and legends. Renowned John Golden will spin tales and sing songs of the sea for us – great fun!
- Sunday breakfast is at Atlantic Towers Condominiums, Carolina Beach.

Special suite reservation rates available. Contact Bett Padgett: [bett@bettpadgett.com](mailto:bett@bettpadgett.com); (919) 787-6378.

***Members will receive detailed mailings about the scheduled events along with registration information. Mark the dates on your calendar!***



Join the Outer Banks Lighthouse Society during its weekend of special events exploring the historic Cape Fear River region. Enjoy an evening aboard the Royal Winner Princess II. Have fun while learning about and supporting NC's lighthouses!

*Image courtesy of Lighthouse Publications.*

