

Bones Of Many Proud Old Ships Lie Buried Beneath The Sands Of Ocracoke Island

Island Is Backwash Of Graveyard Of Atlantic

Ocracoke Is A Very Strange Land To Visitors

To the visitor going to Ocracoke for the first time, the island is a very strange place. It is a land of dead live oaks, tame wild geese and fresh salt mullet. It is also a place where the finest people in the world make their homes. On the beach are the remnants of proud old ships which were lost in the graveyard of the Atlantic and came ashore in the backwash of tides swirling through Hatteras Bight, Ocracoke, like Hatteras Island, the "Cape Stormy" of the Atlantic Coast, is wind swept and storm swept, but so far there is no record of anyone ever losing their lives there during a hurricane, and no house has ever been blown down by the winds.

It is true that a few houses have been undermined and washed down during severe gales which brought sea tides across the village—but these cases have been very few indeed. The people of Ocracoke are proud of their ancestry. They know that they are descendants, perhaps, of shipwrecked mariners—but they are proud of this whether their ancestor was of Anglo Saxon or Arabian stock. Ocracoke probably had its founding as a result of a shipwreck, and this is a story about some of the ships.

A few days ago on Ocracoke Island I rode across the beach and went crabbing in the surf. If you have never tried crabbing in the surf you have something to look forward to, because you have to match your wits against a crustacean which apparently has no sense at all, but can run sideways faster than you can run forward unless you are in the Olympic class. Leaving the crabbing up to Brantley who can out-run his pappy, I decided to go over and investigate the ribbing of a huge piece of wreckage recently exposed by a sea tide that washed over the beach.

My companion told me that this was what was left of the old four-masted schooner Victoria S., which foundered in the surf of the island about 15 years ago while enroute to some northern port from Georgetown, laden with pine lumber. The lumber was sold at a venue and most of it was bought by a firm in Morehead City and transhipped, but some of the shipwrecked timber was used in the construction of new homes on Ocracoke.

Sand and time have greatly splintered up the remainder of the wreck. The decking, or part of it, is still intact and so are many pieces of the ribbing in the hull. The old wreckage is interesting thought and because it is near Ocracoke community, within easy walking distance for persons going to the surf, this disfigured corpse of a once proud sailing vessel is perhaps the most photographed ship wreck along the coast today. Unless you allow plenty for the extreme bright sunlight and the water and sand reflections plus the clear atmosphere existing on the island perhaps the photo you made was burned up (over exposed)—anyway that is what happened to mine and I was using a K-2 filter at the time.

The old piece of wreckage is only one of many old ships whose bones now lay on Ocracoke Beach. Towards the inlet there are other wrecks but most of them are Down Below in the Hammock and Great Swash region. There are more wrecks on Ocracoke beach than at Hatteras and the stranger wonders why. The answer is that Ocracoke beach is a sort of backwash for ships getting in trouble off Diamond Shoals, that section of the ocean which has long been known by mariners as "the Graveyard of the Atlantic."

Coming northward the sailing is clear as long as the mariner keeps in the current of the Gulf Stream which moves up the coast at the rate of about six miles an hour until it reaches Hatteras and then curves to the northeastward. Ships in sailing days would leave the stream off Diamond Shoals and if conditions were favorably they continued northward in the waters of the North Atlantic which meet the warmer waters of the South Atlantic at Hatteras. If the weather was stormy—and that is not unusual because the region is the "Cape Stormy" of the Atlantic Coast vessels leaving the stream would get in the currents swirling through Hatteras Bight eventually—if unlucky, would boomerang back onto the beach at Ocracoke.

THE GHOSTSHIP

There are the bones of many famous old shipwrecks on Ocracoke Beach today. Sometimes they are

covered with sand but when exposed, many of the most famous can be identified by the islander who may be accompanying you along the beach. One of the most famous is the old "ghost ship." And that is a story for you!

The lookout on duty at the Hatteras Inlet Coast Guard station at dawn on January 21, 1921, saw a 5-masted schooner under full sail aground on the Outer Diamond of Diamond Shoals. No distress signals were flying. When the station surfboat reached the schooner, the crew found it utterly deserted—except for a cat. It was the Carroll A. Deering, home port Bath, Maine, in ballast from Barbados to Portland. She had lost both anchors, and both lifeboats were missing; otherwise all was well. If the crew had abandoned ship they must have left in a hurry, for there was food standing in the pots on the galley range and on the plates laid on the mess table.

Only the previous afternoon the Deering had hailed the Lookout Lighthouse 60 miles southwestward, reporting she had lost her anchors in a two-day storm asking that Norfolk be wireless to send a tug to tow her in. The lightship's wireless was out of order, but a steamer appearing southbound soon after, the lightship hailed her to stand by for a message.

Instead the steamer altered its course, heading off shore and the deck of the crew unfurled a tarpaulin and lowered it over the counter, hiding the steamer's name. The daughter of the Deering's master demanded that an investigation be made, which developed that the Deering master had spoken to the Cape Fear Lightship five days earlier. The storm appeared to account for the delay.

Nothing more was learned, although just about every investigating division of the Government worked on the case for many months trying to solve the mystery. Nothing more was learned of the Deering's crew and after 20 years the crew is still missing and the possible connection of the steamer with the mystery is only surmise.

In the same period the steamer Hewitt, Texas to Boston, vanished without trace off Hatteras.

FLYING DUTCHMAN

Few ships have ever grounded on Diamond Shoals and come off—that is, nothing came off except the wreckage which usually fetches up on Ocracoke Beach. The Maurice R. Thurlow was a notable exception. She struck in a storm on October 13, 1927. The lookout at Cape Hatteras Station, 10 miles northeast of Ocracoke Island, sighted her distress signal and motor lifeboats put out and saved the crew of nine.

When the morning of the fourteenth dawned, the Thurlow had vanished. It could not have broken up in that time—although strange things happen in the Graveyard of the Atlantic—so the Coast Guard Cutter Mascoutin was dispatched from Norfolk to search for her. The cutter found no trace, but 13 days later a Dutch oil tanker sighted the vessel in the North Atlantic. More Coast Guard vessels put out to run down the Flying Dutchman, but she was never sighted again—a phantom ship.

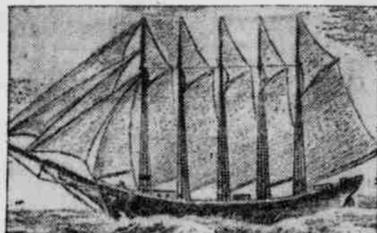
OTHER WRECKS

Last vessel lost in Ocracoke waters was the Albatross, world's largest beam trawler. She put in to Morehead City during a storm on her first fishing voyage out of Hampton, Va., after being transformed into a trawler, sailed on one clear morning, went to Ocracoke Inlet and promptly went aground—not so far from the shoal in the inlet where the Portuguese "Vera Cruz" foundered back in 1904. That was in 1939—and the vessel was a complete loss despite the fact that owners had divers trying to recover the engines for several weeks.

This Vera Cruz which foundered in the Inlet was loaded to the gunnels with three or four hundred Cape Verde Island Negro immigrants, who were cast ashore on Portsmouth beach, succored there for a few days and subsequently returned—except those with the proper entrance papers to the Cape Verde Island. The "evil" master of the vessel "Vera Cruz" escaped before the Revenue Cutter arrived from New Bern, and with him went the personal belongings of many of his passengers. It was later learned that he was trying to enter the immigrants into America without proper papers and that he finally left the country without being caught in a sperm oil barrel aboard a New Bedford whaler.

The first six-masted schooner ever built—the George W. Wells, and a British tramp, the Brewster, both foundered on the same day on Ocracoke Beach. The Brewster was finally able to be refloated,

Ghost Ship Of The Graveyard Of The Atlantic



SHE FINALLY FETCHED UP ON THE BEACH AT OCRACOKE

Twenty years ago the 5-masted schooner Carroll A. Deering foundered on the Outer Diamond of Diamond Shoals. With all sails set, Coast Guard went to her aid but found not a soul aboard. An investigation was held by several governmental agencies, but what became of the crew was not learned and the mystery is still unsolved. Months after the vessel stranded and broke to pieces her bow washed ashore on Ocracoke Beach. Part of the old "ghostship" is shown in photo at right. Persons in the picture are Brantley Brown and Miss Ruth Lewis of Beaufort and Miss Hattie Styron and David Gaskill of Ocracoke. (Sketch of Deering by Jesse A. Giles—Photos by Aycock Brown).



but the Wells was a total loss. That was back in 1913. A section of the beach at Ocracoke until this day is known by the natives as The Wells.

The fabled wreck of all goes back eighty-seven years when the Flying Cloud wrecked. For years I was under the impression that this Flying Cloud was the famous clipper. After Cape Stormy in the Post, Wesley Stout, its editor, was embarrassed because I had tied in a Flying Cloud with my Ocracoke story. The clipper, as you probably do not know, did not end her career until in the 1870's. I listed a Flying Cloud wrecking on Ocracoke Beach in 1854.

Jamie Styron, a commercial fisherman and guide, had the figurehead, inherited from his father, which reputedly came from the old Flying Cloud—and Jamie's brother Lige will still sing the chantey which was composed by an islander about the ship that begins like this:

Oh! I looked to the east'ard,
And I looked to the west'ard—
And I saw ole Flying Cloud
a-comin'

She was loaded with silks,
And the finest of satins,

But now she's gone across Jordan.

After Cape Stormy, the Post editor called this apparent error to my attention. A few days later from some small port on Low Island came a letter to the Post which was forwarded to me from an old timer saying: "It could not have been the famous clipper 'Flying Cloud' but perhaps it was a Barkentine by the name of Flying Cloud, built in 1853 and presumably lost on a South Atlantic Beach the following year. Of this I have no further information. The 'Flying Cloud Figurehead' which Jamie Styron owned was eventually sold to a summer resident at Nags Head who uses it with other souvenirs of the sea to decorate the cottage.

Wrecks not only are fewer today but they are laden with no silks and satins. A vendue in the Flying Cloud's time must have been something to remember. Worst wreck in the number of lives lost was that of the sidewheel packet "Home" off Ocracoke in 1837, almost a hundred drowning.

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Art And The Army Meet At Camp Davis

CAMP DAVIS, Aug. 21. — Art and the army may seem miles apart, but Artist Paul Soik, Jr., New Jersey selectee, might receive his most important assignment in the military atmosphere of Camp Davis. He is being considered to paint murals for the eight regimental chapels now, under construction at the training center.

Soik, 22 years old, already has an illustrious background for an artist so youthful. He first achieved notice as a senior in Lyndhurst, N. J. high school, where he was editor of the covered yearbook. As a student, his class programs were different, his posters were meaningful.

From the beginning, Soik has honestly recorded his impressions of life, spurning surrealism. After graduating from high school, he attended the Arts Career school in New York City, studying under Lee Kimmel, nationally known illustrator; Penrhyn Stanlaws, portrait artist; Miss Paula Hitchison, fashion illustrator, and Justice Na-

politano, commercial designer. The Camp Davis soldier won the Special Merit award in an international poster contest for the prevention of war. His was the best poster in the state of New Jersey in a contest designed to promote preservation of wild life. His painting, "Boone's First Sight of Kentucky," won for him a scholarship.

At present Soik is assigned to Training Battery No. 2 of the Barrage Balloon Training Center. In his leisure time the soldier artist keeps in painting trim. If authorities sanction the chapel murals plan, Soik probably will use "Religion in American History" as his theme.

Sgt. Wood V. F. W. Not A Selectee

CAMP DAVIS, Aug. 21. — Sgt. Albert E. Wood of Camp Davis finds himself in the unique position of being a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a selectee at the same time, a coincidence which officers say might be without parallel in the army. The soldier qualified for membership in the V. F. W. by serving with the U. S. Marines during the second Nicaraguan campaign. He was with the Marines from 1928 until 1931, when he was discharged.

On that day in 1931 when he received his discharge papers, Pvt. First Class Wood didn't have the slightest idea he would be in the army ten years later.

When he returned from service to his home in Dearborn, Michigan, Wood became an active member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and of the Military Order of the Cottie. He even was a member of the V. F. W. national championship drum and bugle corps.

After entering the service for the second time, the "Cottie" order saw fit to make Wood "Supreme Aide-de-Camp," a national officer.

Wood had a rather low number in the national selective service lottery and was called back to duty last spring, being assigned to Battery A of the 93rd Coast Artillery regiment, one of the first units to be activated at Camp Davis.

He started out as a buck private, but officers were quick to notice his military aptitudes. Promotions—first to corporal, then to sergeant—came quickly. Sgt. Wood is finding the new army to his liking.

But he can't suppress a smile as he looks back to 1931, when he thought his military career had ended.

Prices running into four figures have been common at beef cattle sales this year, as the industry has enjoyed the most successful purebred season in 20 years.

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