

ACTION OFF OCRACOKE

By WILBORNE HARRELL and HEYWOOD ZIEGLER, JR.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED

(Continued From Last Week)

Jonathan Banks, a merchant of Edenton who died in 1765, left a diary which has recently been found. In the diary he describes how he met Blackbeard, joined him in outfitting a vessel for pirating; how Blackbeard met Anne Bonney and fell in love with her, and how, tiring of the hazardous life of freebooter, Blackbeard accepts King's Pardon and comes ashore, settling on his estate on the Pasquotank River. Anne Bonney also accepts King's Pardon and settles nearby. It is there that Blackbeard learns that Lieutenant Maynard is proceeding south against him. Blackbeard immediately prepares to sail for his rendezvous at Ocracoke, for greater safety.

The voyage down the Pasquotank and to Ocracoke proved uneventful, and the night of November 21, 1718, found us anchored inside Ocracoke Inlet. The night was very dark and the lanterns showing on the anchored ships winked like fireflies. We had learned that Maynard was somewhere outside the Inlet, but we did not know his exact location.

Ashore, on Ocracoke Island, lights showed from the doors and windows of the small settlement. Faintly, from across the water, came the sounds of music and laughter. Evidently some form of entertainment was in progress, and much grog and rum must be flowing down hilarious throats.

Blackbeard, Jackson and I stood at the rail and soberly viewed the darkness around us. We gave ear to the far off sounds of shuffling, dancing feet and the scraping of fiddles. Jackson licked his lips; he liked his rum. And the thought of much flowing liquor was causing his mouth to water.

Blackbeard slapped his hand on the rail, the gesture of a man who has come to a decision. "Gentlemen," he said, "we go ashore. It is imperative that we get information of Lieut. Maynard; maybe we'll find it ashore where drunken tongues may unguardedly tell us what we need to know."

I saw Jackson's face light up. I knew a trip ashore would appeal to him. There was danger ashore, but Jackson would fly into the face of the devil himself for a measure of rum. A boat was lowered and with muffled oars Jackson rowed us ashore. The boat made scarcely a sound as it rippled through the quiet waters, and soon the bow grated on sandy beach. We pulled the boat farther up-shore so she wouldn't float with the tide; and talking in subdued voices, we approached the large building from whence came the sound of much merry-making and drunken voices, shouting and singing. Above the door hung a sign that seemed incongruous and out of place on this forsaken beach. The sign read: "The Cat and Whistle Arms."

As we stepped across the threshold the landlord, with a wide white apron around his fat middle, for all the world like the landlord in a London tavern, approached us, obsequiously rubbing his hands and bowing. He had no doubt noticed Blackbeard's

rich clothes and envisioned the gold in his pocket, which he hoped to transfer to his own as quickly as possible.

The scene within the tavern that spread out before us was one of bedlam and barbaric splendor. All around us was as choice an array of cut-throats and rogues as ever collected in one place. The motley, swarthy-faced pirates and rascals, dancing and cavorting about us were decked in gayly colored head scarves and silken and velvet sashes. Baggy knee breeches completed most of the costumes. Golden earrings dangled from scarred ears that had heard nothing but the voice of evil and the whisper of the devil. Cutlasses jangled and knives peeped from sashes and silver-studded belts. Broken and pock-marked faces that were more used to bearing ferocious scowls and frowns, wore beatific and out-of-place smiles. The high-pitched voices and shrill laughter of women mingled with the deeper and harsher voices of the men. Everybody was gay; everybody was drunk . . .

I must pause a moment and rest my fast failing hand, husband my strength; for they must not fail me until I have completed this diary to the last bitter word. As I lay on my pillow, here in Edenton, shouts and sounds of carousing come from the water-front taverns. A ship has docked, and these noises bring back vividly my seagoing days and the scene in the tavern on Ocracoke. But, back to my story before my ebbing life brings this tale to a premature close.

Blackbeard set his mug down on the table. "We're in luck, mates," he said. "Here comes Benjamin Wiggs. He's very, very drunk, and when he's drunk, his tongue wags betimes. I think we'll learn something of value from Mister Benjamin." He signalled the landlord, who hovered nearby, and pointed at Benjamin. The landlord caught the hint, and unobtrusively but forcibly seated the drunken Mr. Wiggs at our table. He set a full glass of rum before him, and beaming patronizingly at us, backed away.

Ben Wiggs drained his mug and Blackbeard refilled it. The mug was filled and refilled several times before Blackbeard leaned forward, and lowering his voice, said, "Tell me, Ben, ha' you any news of our friend Maynard? He's lying outside the Inlet, and tomorrow, if I guess rightly, we'll all have a fight on our hands. Come, Ben, tell your old shipmate, Blackbeard." Blackbeard laid his hand on Ben's shoulder in a comradely gesture, and with the other hand refilled the ever-emptying mug.

Ben stared at Blackbeard and started talking. Maynard, he told us, had come ashore that afternoon and had tried to secure natives to pilot him through the Inlet and across the treacherous Ocracoke shoals, but had been unsuccessful in obtaining them. Then Ben began to laugh. He took another swig of his rum and peered owlishly at Blackbeard. "Why Mr. Teach, sir," said Ben, "that swab, Maynard, would not know ye if he was to look ye square in the face. Why, he wouldn't know the famous Blackbeard from—from—" He glowered solemnly around the table. "Why, Maynard wouldn't know ye from Mister Jackson, there." Ben stared at Jackson, who was in the act of raising



Above is pictured Mr. and Mrs. Merrill Rayner of Lonaconing, Md., former stage and radio entertainers. Mr. Rayner is conducting revival meetings at the North Edenton Assembly of God Church, of which the Rev. George W. Burkhart is pastor. Special music is featured at each service by Evangelist and Mrs. Rayner.

a full mug of rum to his lips, and lapsed into drunken lethargy.

Jackson began to sing in a hoarse voice and swing his mug in rhythmic motion to the song.

"Heave ho! Heave ho! Heave ho, my hearties, heave ho!"

Blackbeard looked up sharply and stared long and thoughtfully at Jackson. Yes, truly, Jackson did somewhat resemble Blackbeard, and Maynard could easily mistake the one for the other. Blackbeard's eyebrows puckered; something, some plan, was germinating in his fertile brain.

Abruptly Blackbeard stood up. "We've learned enough—back to the Revenge." He grasped the now thoroughly drunken Jackson by the arms and bodily hauled him from the tavern. We made our way to the beach, and shoving off, rowed back to the ship. All the way, Blackbeard sat quietly in the stern sheets, lost in thought and saying not a word . . .

And now comes the final act in my drama—the end of my story, my diary, and the end of my life. Before the ink is dry on these pages, I will be no more, my body will be at rest; and, I hope, with the unburdening of my conscience, my soul will be at rest . . .

We stood at the rail, Blackbeard, Anne Bonney and I. Anne Bonney was dressed in short sailor's trousers and silken shirt. In her hand she flicked nervously, back and forth, the long bull-whip of rhinoceros hide she always carried aboard ship. It was a better disuader of unwelcome masculine attention than a knife or a pistol. She looked morosely at Ocracoke Inlet where evidence of activity was becoming apparent. Every now and then her eyes shifted in a furtive glance to Blackbeard, standing beside her. Blackbeard was very drunk, and he held in unsteady hands a long spyglass which he had trained on Ocracoke Inlet.

All the morning, we aboard our sloop, watched Maynard's two vessels in the Inlet, three miles away. Maynard's fleet consisted of a schooner and a sloop; and the best we could make out at that distance, they mounted no cannon and did not appear to be well equipped for fighting, especially against the Revenge, which

lined with guns and cutlasses, ready to repel boarders. Blackbeard still trained his glass on the Inlet, lowering it intermittently to issue some order. Anne Bonney snaked her whip in a vicious flick.

(Continued Next Week)

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NOTICE!

To Chowan County TAXPAYERS

The Tax Books for the year 1950 are now in my hands for the collection of taxes. We urge you to pay your taxes now and thus avoid the penalty which will begin on February 1.

A PENALTY OF 1% WILL BE ADDED ON 1950 TAXES NOT PAID BEFORE FEBRUARY 2. ANOTHER 1% WILL BE ADDED MARCH 2 AND AN ADDITIONAL 1/2 OF 1% WILL BE ADDED FOR EACH ADDITIONAL MONTH TAXES ARE UNPAID.

J. A. BUNCH

SHERIFF OF CHOWAN COUNTY