

Ocracoke Speaks



THE DISTINCT
SOUNDS
OF THE
“HOI TOIDE”

Brogue




OCRACOKE PRESERVATION SOCIETY
NORTH CAROLINA LANGUAGE AND LIFE PROJECT

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"HOI TOIDE"

Brogue



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Ocracoke Speaks



Rex O'Neal shares some island phrases with Walt Wolfram and Natalie Shilling-Estes. (Photograph by Herman Lankeford)

Track 1: Rex O'Neal

And it's high tide on the sound side. Last night the water fire, tonight the moon shine— no fish. What you suppose the matter, Uncle Woods?

Track 2: Speaking for a Biscuit. Candy Gaskill

I think it was second summer after the 'Brogue people' had been down interviewing me. They had either read the story somewhere or heard about it or seen it on TV or something or other. I was sitting up here by the cash register just, I don't know, reading the newspapers or something or other. And this man and woman walked in and I was like, "Hi, how are y'all," you know, and they walked around and stuff and everything, and the lady come up and she said, "Speak!" And I said, "Excuse me, what do you mean, speak? I'm talking to you right now. " "No! You have this way that y'all are supposed to talk down here. Speak!" And I'm like, "Ma'am, this is the way I talk. I've lived here thirty some years," I said. "And I've always talked like this." So that was basically about the story: she wanted me to speak and I got ready to say, "Well, you gonna give me a biscuit and I'll be glad to speak."

History of Ocracoke

Track 3: Early Ocracoke. Ellen Cloud

It wasn't inhabited at all until then—Ocracoke Inlet was the only inlet that stayed open and hadn't shifted or changed or filled in, and John Gray Blount, from over the mainland—Blount's Creek is named after him—he owned one of the biggest shipping companies, and he owned farmland—a lot of places over there. So he and another man, John Wallace, set up a place over on what they call Shell Castle Rock which is in Ocracoke Inlet, for shipping. Built warehouses and wharfs and all this. So the ships were coming in and unloading here and they'd take them by smaller boats and deliver the supplies on through the sound. So there was this need even before that, there was this big need for pilots because the sand bars in the inlet would change, and the ships would get aground or crash or whatever. So the government sent pilots here to settle. And they laid off some land for them to have a place to pull up their boats and build shacks to live in or whatever. And that was the first settlers that came—same thing at Portsmouth. And those pilots that came here in 1715 are the local names today. They stayed.

Track 4: The Naming of Ocracoke. Maurice Balance

Well, according to legend, it was an old Indian name. Claim it was Blackbeard. You ever heard that, about Blackbeard? Old crow cock and all that stuff, you know. Wanting them fowls to crow and the roosters to crow so he could get out of the inlet. I think that's gunk.

Track 5: The Naming of Ocracoke. Charlie Williams

Well, they always said that Blackbeard laid out here in the inlet. He found out there was a Lieutenant Maynard, I reckon, was after him—I believe that's the way it is. But he wanted to get going, he wanted to get out of the inlet. When the rooster crows in the morning, it's getting close to daylight. So he said, "Old cock, crow!" And after that the old cock crowed and he went out. But they changed the name around—Ocracoke. That's what I always been taught.

Track 6: O'Cockers. Robert "Washie" Spencer

Well, this is a Indian name, they said. But they spell it two or three different ways—we don't, but I seen it different places spelled a couple of different ways. Claimed it was an Indian name: Ohcrow, Ohcock, Ocracow, Ococoa. Everything but Ocracoke.

[So what do you call the people who live on Ocracoke?]

Ocracokers.

[Ocracokers? Some people call them O'cocks, the Ocracokers.]

Ocockers. Here's one of the older ones will say O'cockers.

[Yeah?]

When you hear him say "O'cocker," most of the time, he's one of the older ones.

Track 7: Creekers and Pointers. Ellen Cloud

You might not can tell the difference here, but the Pointers talk different from the Creekers. Right here on this island. Some expressions and some are still different. But used to—it was really, really different. And the reason for that was because it was like two communities. I mean, they were really divided, the Creekers and Pointers. I'm a Creeker, people who live on this side of the creek—Silver Lake, you might know it as here; it's not a lake, it's a creek. It opens and closes to the sound. Anyway, the people on this side are the Creekers, and people that live on the other side by the lighthouse are Pointers.

[Because they live on the point?]

And at one time from the creek to the beach there were what we called drains. There were two streams of water—ditches—that went, run right where Creekside Cafe is—right where the road turns there. One cut through there. And there was another one right about where Sharon Miller's Realty, was another one that went on through. And there were two bridges on each ditch. One on the creek side of each one of them, and one over by the Island Inn and one over further. And those two bodies of water separated the Creekers and the Pointers. And at one time it was like, you just didn't have anything to do with the Pointers, or the Pointers didn't have anything to do with a Creeker.

*Walt Wolfram and Natalie
Shilling-Estes chat casually
with Chester Lynn.
(Photograph by Herman
Lankford)*



Track 8: Making Houses out of Ships. Chester Lynn

I had some pictures one time out to the restaurant and I was going through some old photographs and everybody used to talk about, well, they built all these houses out of these, all these ships. And when I was a kid, I thought, big deal. How much boards can they get out of a ship to build a house Well, I never thought about that until I took some photographs out and saw the size of somebody standing on the beach and that ship right beside.

[Really:]

Now, that was the difference. I mean, some of those ships that come ashore here were absolutely massive, massive boats. I mean massive. And those hull things, the only reason that they're left on the beach was because that's all was left. Everything else was carted in to make the houses out of. So you'll never find boards a-crumbling. In the hull, there's round beams they couldn't use, so that's the only reason that they're there. because they'd a-toted those back to the village, too. Most of the straight beams and seals to the houses and stuff were from the boat.

Track 9: Curing Yaupon. Clinton Gaskill

We used to cure yaupon. Cure yaupon for tea. You used to cure that. You used to have a big vat. Dug a hole in the ground, throw the vat onto it. Used to have a lot of stones. You heat them stones with that fire and that vat. You take them stones and put it right on top of yaupon and cure it.

[They used the berries from the yaupon? Or the leaves, or roots?]

No, they just used the leaves.

[Just the leaves]

Cured them, get the tender stuff out of it.

Track 10: A Good Teacher. Charlie Williams

I went up to and through the eighth grade. At that time they didn't have anything any higher, but a year or so later, they did get the high school, but I was too far gone. Too far out. I didn't get in no higher than that. I'll show you my certificate before you go out; it's hanging up in there. A Portuguese school principal signed that certificate in 1927. One of the best teachers I ever had and what I don't know, it wasn't his fault cause he tried to drill it into me, yes sir. I give him a lot of credit. Nice fellow. He weren't too tall; he stayed here. There was an inn down here. The hurricane got it in '44, but he stayed there that winter. He put his bathing suit on and it never been so cold. He'd run up on the dock and dive overboard and swim around and come back up the ladder, turn right back and put his clothes on and go to school. He was a good man, a good man, yeah. His name was John Andrew.

Track 11: Horse Penning. Clinton Gaskill

They'd, they used to have the horse penning. The horse penning. Them days, they used to pen once a year. Horses.

[To thin the ponies out?]

Yeah, and they used to pen once a year. To brand the colts. And I think from that time, everybody had a good time on the island them days, the Fourth of July.

[Is that when they would traditionally do it?]

That was our regular way we spent the Fourth of July, penning horses. And the sheep penning we'd do. I miss that the worst in this world. Sheep penning.

[There were sheep on the island, too?]

Sheep on the island? Yeah, we had a lot of sheep on this island. Well,

they built the highway, and you see them and you have to take them off. I had about twenty-five head of sheep.

[Well, did, when they had the horse penning, were the horses offered for sale to the public, or .]

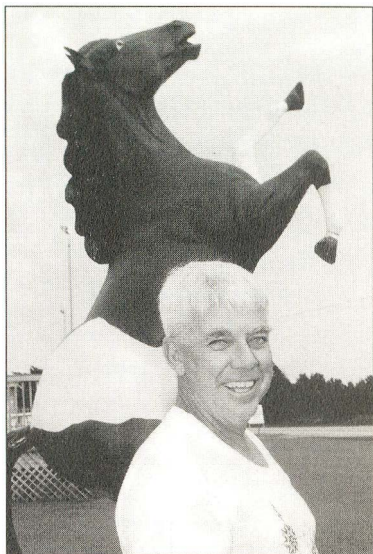
We sell them out and sell them out and pen them out, sometimes. We had a lot of horses here. Yeah, I think that was about our biggest day we ever had.

Track 12: Pony Penning. James Barrie Gaskill

We had a pony penning every Fourth of July. Yeah we had a pony penning. You see, the horses run wild. You'd go down the night before, the evening before, the ones that was going to drive the horses back, or the ponies back and go on the north end and camp out. And then start at daylight the next morning. There was like five or six different bunches. You know, each stallion had, you know, anywhere from eight, ten, fifteen, twenty mares. They stayed in groups. You know, their groups started penning, you know. When one group would catch up with the other, they'd fight all the way up, coming all the way up to the penning. The last pony penning we had was right out, right out where the new part of the Island Inn is now.

Track 13: Mounted Boy Scout Troop. Dave Esham

Back, I don't know when it was, probably about 19- it was in the early 50s, about 1952. A fellow named Marvin Howard retired from the Army Corps of Engineers, and he was originally from Ocracoke and moved back here, and he just liked to ride horses. And, of course, most of us boys then had horses or we could get horses. And he decided to form a mounted Boy Scout troop. At that time, it was the only mounted Boy Scout troop in the world. There's pictures hanging up in the restaurant of a bunch of us boys on horses and scattered around there's, there's pictures. *Boy's Life* came in and did a big article and had our pictures in it. There's two or three of the magazines, *Life* magazine.



*David Esbam outside the
Pony Island Motel.
(Photograph by Ann
Sebrell Ebringhaus)*

Track 14: Catching Fish. Robert “Washie” Spencer

Miller’s Beach, where the airport is? Between here and there, we boys, we’d sharpen us a stick, a broom handle or put a nail in it. What would happen is sea tide would run over, and then the sound tide would come up and it cut holes in the beach. Big holes in the beach, you know. Flounders, fish, you know, trout, drums, would get in that hole and couldn’t get back out. A hole in the beach. And we boys would take a broom handle and put us a nail in it or sharpen it and gig flounder and puppy drum.

Track 15: The Mailboat. Muzel Bryant

[Did you go meet the mailboat when it would come?]

I wouldn’t ever, but some of the other people would meet the mail, a lot of people on the island would meet the mail; a lot of people on the island would meet the mailboat when it used to come. Used to have the mailboat bring the mail in. Used to be a post office on the other side of the creek, but it’s not there any more. Carry mail to, people used to go and meet the mailboat down to the waterfront.

Track 16: Old Horatio. Elenora Hamilton

Old Horatio, which was my great-grandfather and it was Elizabeth's grandfather, he was a character. He had a sailing vessel that was built on Ocracoke and put together with tar and pegs. And he would go all up the coast to buy you know, that's where they got all their food and furniture and everything. And he did go and took Elizabeth's mother, when she was a young girl, to New York and somebody else went with her. And they went on a buying trip. But he was a catbird. He had during the Civil War, he was stationed in South Carolina—I think it was South Carolina—and he went around and told his crew that they're getting out at twelve o'clock. The orders was for nobody to leave the harbor, but he said, "No Yank's going to keep me here." So he left and they said the guns were firing everywhere, but they made it. And when they got in this inlet—which was the only inlet at that time; we had an inlet, but it was very shallow back round this way—and he said, "We're not stopping at Ocracoke; we're going to sink our vessel." So he took and went up the river, and he said, "Sink the vessel and leave the mast out about a foot so I can raise it when the war is over." And I would say bad words because he did say bad words—"No damn Yankee's going to fight the South with my ship!" And of course, then, everything was cut off. They had no way of getting anything to eat here. And these Yanks came over. We had Yanks that settled here, I mean, and they were hungry. And somebody said, "Well, go to Horatio's. He has plenty of chickens to sell." So my grandmother—I remember her; she was a dainty little thing—and she went to the door. And these boys were all dressed in their uniforms, and said, "We want to speak to Horatio, Captain Horatio." So Grandpapa came to the door, and they said, "We would like to buy some chickens." He said, "Don't ever let it be said that I sold a Yank any chickens. Go out and steal them." Grandmama said that those boys laughed until tears came down their faces because Grandpapa wouldn't take their money.

Track 17: The Cross. Elenora Hamilton

One time, on the island, we did not have but one motel—or hotel. And it was called Bill Gaskill's. I don't know whether you've heard this story or not. But Bill Gaskill had a real nice place. They all ate together in the dining room, and family-business-like. And he had a son called Jim Bob and during the second World War, he was on an oil tanker and his oil tanker blew up somewhere between here and Florida. And his cousin was walking up the beach and saw this wood thing floating and waited until it washed ashore and it was his cousin's cabin door, license on it. The next day, the name of the oil tanker came into that inlet down there, had to come five miles up and washed in his father's yard. And that is the truth. And his sisters—I think one of them was married to a doctor in Raleigh if I'm not mistaken; see I wasn't here at that time—and his two sisters had a man, that did carving down here, carve out a cross out of the wood and it's in our church. It stands in our church right under Christ's picture. And on both sides they have the candles, and that was quite wonderful, I think.

Track 18: A Family After Death. Ellen Cloud

Estate papers gives you more about their lifestyle than anything else that you can study. They didn't have a will then, they had estate papers. The court would appoint an administrator, and that administrator would have to take an inventory of everything that person owned when they died. I mean, everything. How many—even how many forks, knives, cup with a broken handle. Everything they owned was listed. And then they had a public auction and it was all auctioned off, and there was no welfare, and the court took the money and then gave the widow and the children so much per year for their support. Everything was—except for the real estate, and the property wasn't—that was usually held until the children came up heirs and then it was divided up—but the personal property was sold and the slaves were sold, and that was put for the support of that family.

[So you couldn't will stuff to people at all?]

You could, but I'm saying if they died without a will.

[Now in addition to that money being divided up for the widows and the children, have you come across information about how the widows supported themselves beyond that money, I mean, was it enough where they could just live? Or were there jobs available for them to support their family?]

No, and usually—once in a while you'll find where they got money, but most of the time they didn't. They were allotted so many barrels of pork, so many barrels of flour, so much molasses for that year, and it was given to them in food or whatever. Not money.

[So pretty much that was enough for them to live off of then, after that, so that took care of them.]

Mm-hmm. And usually, I've found that most of the women, they took in laundry, or, you know, cleaned house for somebody or did something like that to help support them. But, most of the time they remarried. I mean, it was almost a necessity to remarry if you have a big family. And the other thing I have found—and not just Ocracoke, but in other genealogies I've done, too—a lot of times they marry like if the husband dies and the woman is left with children, she might marry the brother, the husband's brother. He might take on that responsibility of taking care of those kids and would marry her. But more often than that was if the woman died—and a lot of women died at childbirth—her sister would probably come in and take care of the baby and the children and then end up marrying him. But many, many, many times, the sister marries the husband and takes care of them.

Track 19: An Ocracoke Recipe. Chester Lynn

Like some of our recipes, where they are, you know, culture differences. You know, one particular recipe that the island has, and they make blackberry dumplings, out of blackberries, which everybody makes blackberry dumplings. Well, they make an egg sauce to go on top of it, and they beat the white of an egg. They separate the egg; they beat the white of the egg in one bowl like flavored meringue. Then they take the yellow and beat that up and put some, like, lemon or vanilla flavoring into it and



*Cindy Gaskill and Chester
Lynn chat outside Albert
Styron's General Store.
(Photograph by Ann
Sebrell Ehringhaus)*

then put sugar into it and then dump that in the meringue and mix it all together. And you eat it like whipped cream on top of the dumpling. And it's been all of our life, I mean, it's been on here as long as we know. As far as the health department, to think that you're eating raw eggs just beaten, they have a spell, you know, because they're in this thing about eggs and all that.

[Salmonella].

Salmonella and all, so they're real particular about that, but all of our lives we did that and that's one of Ocracoke's most famous, you know, at least it is with the locals. Well, that's a very French, you know, a very French recipe and nobody knows how it even got here. I mean, they don't, half the locals probably don't even know it's French. You know, they just think it's Ocracoke.

Weather on Ocracoke

Track 20: Story of the Hurricane of 1944. Charlie Williams

We come back into harbor, prettiest day you ever saw. One of the fellers in the crew said, "There goes Washie's fence with all the rope being towed." Said we must be gonna have a hurricane or something. Be coming down to put some new ropes on his boat and re-tie it up.

So we come up and tied our rig up, like we always did after we got our fish out. And we come home and they said we gonna have a hurricane tonight. Said, "Gee, it don't look like it now." About four o'clock the next morning this wall—would blow and rain and in fifteen, twenty minutes it would die down. The other fifteen minutes it would do the same thing but a little harder and a little worse. It did that, woke me up about four o'clock. And it kept doing that until ten o'clock that day, till that wind got over a hundred miles an hour. And it was twenty-seven inches of water on this floor cause I raised it up thirty-three inches since then. Couldn't keep dry down here so we had to go upstairs. But I want to tell you, two or three houses, that church went off the foundation, another bungalow out here did. After ten o'clock, the wind died down, and all the water run off just as fast as it came up. We went down to see our boats, there weren't a thing a-floating in the harbor. Everything we had was sunk right in the middle of the fishing season. September, that's when we did our hauling. September, October, and November. But before we got our stuff back in shape fishing, that type of fishing was over. Somebody said, "Well, didn't do you no harm, didn't tear your house up." I said I'll never know how much harm it did because I've lost a year's worth.

Track 21: Story of the Hurricane of 1944. Essie O'Neal

That was the storm. This was another thing we're talking about. I had a new maple bedroom set. And I had just got it in the house, three or four days, when the storm come—the '44 storm. We had a pretty day, just like this. No wind, pretty sunshine. And the day that came over that day and said there's a bad storm heading right straight for us. And we didn't believe it. "They ain't no storm," you know. "They ain't no storm come." Said, "Yes, its heading right straight for Cape Hatteras." And it was a pretty, calm day. And that night, after it got to dark good, went out on the porch with Harry and we went out on the porch and the stars was shining. He says, "I don't think there's no storm." He said, "It don't look like a storm." And everything was calm. But let me tell you, when we woke up the next morning, I thought the roof was gonna come off my house. I

never heard such a hard wind. It was a hundred miles, blowing a hundred miles. I never heard such a hard wind. And he said "You better get up and get all them kids ready, get them dressed, we'll have to leave here." And I was working fast as I could to get 'em all and put 'em to the table, hurry, get them breakfast and everything. Harry looked, and the tide was a-rolling right in the yard. Come up so fast, it was a-rolling in the yard. And we got them, and that's when we left. And when we left out of that gate, I tell you, it was about four foot of water in the gate when we left. And we had to leave here in a boat. We had a half grown pig. And he didn't want him to drowned, you know. He had a old, big wooden trunk—big old-timey trunks. So he put him in the trunk and put the trunk on the porch. I said, "When that pig floats around in that trunk, he'll think he's in a boat." And we went on Mickey's—Mickey that lives over there, closer to that graveyard down there, that cemetery. That's where we spent that storm out. Tide run off at Amy lake. Harry said, "I'm going up to the house, if we got a house." We didn't even think we had a house. And I said, "Can we go?" and he said, "No, better stay here, wait till I go." So when he come back, he had a sad news to say. He said, "Well, I'll tell you, I saw the house was standing." He said, "But the door was wide open, had blowed open," he said, "and the first thing I met was the pig coming out of the living room."

Track 22: Story of Hurricane of 1944. Robert "Washie" Spencer

The last real bad one they had—course, they had some since then—the last real bad one they had was 1944. Dad was here in the Coast Guard. Dad said there never was a prettier day. Feller there was named Acock Brown. You might have heard of him, he was a man owned a paper printing paper company. He was down at Beaufort and then he went up to Manteo. Well-known. Very smart man. He told them he got attached to the Navy somehow or other, intelligence or something, think. Dad said he come around and told them all, "We're gonna have a bad hurricane." Everything was beautiful. Beautiful. Everybody looked at him like he was crazy. But that day it come in—of course, I was in

the Pacific, I was in the Philippines, but we had a typhoon about the same time. I got caught in that—typhoons are worse. Anyway, Dad was done in the service and Iris and Jane Russell and some more of the fellers around here, they had what they call a beach boat. They go out to sea with, row your net out, catch fish, you know, pull your net ashore. My wife's grandmother, her name was Miss Midgett, they called her, her name was Elizabeth. They had to move some of those people from the water to carry 'em to the lighthouse. She wasn't home. And a bunch of women and a hog or two in that boat. And when they went back down where we lived, our home there by Albert Styron's store on the end, he said it was up to here. Tiptoe with her. He took her in a boat with them people in it and the highest part of the lighthouse then. And he said they went over to the highest part of the lighthouse then, with them people and that hog in there, and them people went right over top of that high lighthouse then and the mother's washing machine and all that turned bottom up in the kitchen, crashed through the window, turned bottom up in the kitchen. And the boats come ashore about where the coffee shop—no, I don't think the coffee shop is there now—by the post office.

Track 23: A Whale on Ocracoke. Dave Esham

Couple years ago out there, whale came right out there—almost to the boat. Big whale. He was blowing water out of his top. You'd see him for about a mile, I guess it was at least a mile, you could see where he was coming towards the boat. And he had like a wake in him—birds were flying in on top of him and stuff, water shooting out of the top of his head. And then he went by the stern of the boat, and I started beating on the side of my boat—you do that to a porpoise, you know, a porpoise come up to it. One of the boys didn't like that, and I got to thinking to myself, "That's pretty stupid, if that thing does come up to the boat." I mean, he was big. That's the closest I've ever been to one of them. And he was just swimming along like nothing. And he got up behind the boat and he went down and never did see him anymore. We saw him about fifteen minutes there coming right towards us. I don't know what kind of whale it was,

*Rev O'Neal and David
Esham share a whale of a
story at the poker house.
(Photograph by Ann
Sebrell Ebringhaus)*



all I know it was a big one. And in my time, in the spring or fall, we'd see these pilot whales, we'd get right in them. They're only about thirty feet long. They'll swim like a porpoise right beside the boat and there probably be a school with two or three hundred in it. And you just go with them. I've seen them quite a few times, but I haven't seen a whole lot of big whales. I've never seen one like one that came up to us that one day.

Ghost Stories

Track 24: The Black Cat. Muzel Bryant

A black cat was go to—jump up in the window. And anybody go out of that house, and one of the black cats jump up in the window, and so people say that you couldn't stay there or some way it were. Then one night the preacher, he taken his Bible, and he said he was going down to stay. And see, that night, the preacher went in, was down in the living room and was sitting down in his rocking chair, and had his Bible. By the time he start reading his Bible, the black cat, he jumped

up there in the window, and the black cat said to the preacher, says, "Ain't nobody here but you and me tonight." The old man told him, "Gee, ain't gonna be nobody here, I reckon, but you."

Track 25: A Ghost in Ocracoke. Rudy Austin

Me and another boy was coming home from the movie theater one night and we had a sand road then, we walked down the sand road—I was staying with my great-grandmother then, down on the shore side where I was born at. Then we sort of split off, and he went on the sand road on around to his house and I sort of cut to what we called a path—a little path, you know, just wide enough to walk down. And it went right down alongside a garden fence. My great-grandfather had a garden there and the vines would grow up the fence and it was a solid wall of vines and so forth. And then right across the path was just everything you could think of—Spanish bayance, blackberry vines, rosebushes, everything. I mean, a cat couldn't have got through it, it was so thick. And there was something white come out of the corner of that garden—it was a still, slick-calm night. And it came to the path where I was walking. And I froze. I mean, I couldn't pick my feet up, scared me so bad I couldn't move. Couldn't holler, I couldn't do anything. And I could see my grandmother, great-grandmother sitting on the back porch, and she was sitting there rocking and had a real dim light on. And she was sitting there rocking, waiting for me to—course I weren't very old then—waiting for me to come home. Still don't know what it was today. But it drifted across, it went across the path, went right on through those thickest of bushes there. I mean where all the vines were, and where all the. . . And that's something I ain't never forgot today. And it was like maybe that high off of the ground, and it just sort of was a mass like so. It didn't really have no shape of no human or anything like that, and it just sort of disappeared into it. I don't know whether it was some form of. . . I talked with a lot of people since then said it was just some form of the humidity or something.

*Walt Wolfram and Natalie
Shilling-Estes interview
David Esham on his boat.
(Photograph by Ann
Sebrell Ebringhaus)*



Track 26: A Token of Death. Rudy Austin

A token of death, meaning that somebody died or something. There's always something beforehand that indicates their death. My mother, and my uncle both. Her sister went around to the post office one night and mail a letter, and they were walking back around the harbor. And there was a gentleman, whose house—part of it's still there, over on the opposite side of the harbor. He was an old feller, lived there by himself. I think his name was Henry Bragg or something. Anyway, there was a ball of fire that come out of his house and they saw it as it tracked across the sky. And the next morning he was dead. And my uncle one time was sitting up, he was sitting up over them—back then it was, you know, you didn't have clinics or nothing, so the best you could do for sickness, you know, anybody was real had off everybody on the island took turns sitting up over them. And this happened up in Hatteras. And my mother was there, she went up there to help, to sit over this individual. And she was a real old woman, and they had her up on a cot over in the corner. And he was sitting by the window reading a book. The window was open, and he cracked the window open right next too him. He just happened to glance up, and they had the lights down dim, you know, where she could rest, you know, and the bright lights. And that same thing happened. He said he saw a ball of fire come out of

her bed and it went right by him and went right of the window. And he screamed—I mean, it scared the life out of him. My mother and my aunt come running out of the kitchen—they were in there fixing coffee or something—and my aunt went right to him and my mother went right to the woman and she was dead. It had just been a few minutes, you know, they had just been in there a few minutes. You know, they just about had to get the doctor to him to calm him down.

Track 27: Dead Body. Elizabeth Parsons

Used to have nets set out for spring, you know, for just to get fish to eat. And down at what we call Springer's Point. And we'd had a hard blow, had a nor'easter, I think. And he went down there—this was a Monday or Sunday morning—to see about his boat. And he was walking around the shore side. And this bag had drifted into shore. It had cinderblocks in it two cinderblocks. And he was all the time picking up stuff and bringing stuff home, you know what I mean? And he took his knife and cut and slit that bag and saw it—oh, Lord—he'd a liketa keel over. He weren't long getting up here and getting the sheriff and they didn't believe him. And come back down there said Royce, "I've been eating my dinner, and if you're telling me a fib, I'm gonna kill you." He said, "I'm not fibbing, there's a body down here." So they went down there and sure enough it was, and they had to get the sheriff's uncle. Had to take his truck and drive all the way back to the beach to get down to where it was at, cause they couldn't get down this way. Come up down there back to the break-water, put it on the truck. He just had his shorts on, and who it was—it must have been Mafia or whatever. They had chopped his fingers, cut his teeth out, had chopped his toes off. Around here people keeps asking you the same set-fire thing over and over again. And people do, you know, and it got on his nerves. Course, he's had a couple nervous breakdowns. And he's the nervous type anyway, at times. And it just started getting to him. And different ones were saying they're gonna come in here and get you for finding that body and this and that you know. They were fooling, but it got to him. He got to the point, he come home here, he was in bad

shape. He was working for the same man down here. And he had been home a number of days. He was so bad, he come home. Nurse couldn't take it. And he come in the house and lock the doors, put sticks on the windows, he'd do everything. And I would have to call the preacher nights never been through nothing like that for three or four weeks.

Track 28: Sam Jones's Castle. Matthew Parsons

Where Sam Jones is buried, down there at—

[beginning to tell him—Mr. Sam Jones from Norfolk, Virginia he's the one that used to own these dormer places around here, with the dormer windows on it the castle.]

Yeah, he was rich.

[Where my husband works at now Berkeley Center, he used to own Berkeley Center.]

He used to own that green place that burnt.

[He's buried now with his horse, next to his horse.]

And I went down there with Linda and their dog. And we went down there, and we went down there, and there was like, a bamboo stick laying upside of a tree. Just like sitting up right over the well on the side of the tree. And I was like, what in the world could have done that. And then, see, the dog didn't—the dog sniffed around the other way and didn't go through the briary part. See, he didn't go through the briary part. Cause I kept an eye on him and Linda did, too, so he wouldn't run away or something like that. And I turned around and went through the woods and go back there round the other side of the well. And there's white hair. White hair not from a dog. This was something else. We went into the graveyard, I forget where he's buried at. And almost stepped in, there's like a big sand dune there. And so we're sitting there, it's like coming like that, you know, grassy and stuff over it. And then when we're going on the way back we went down a little bit farther and down there and there's like fresh berries down there. And it had a log right in front of it, it was the tree there. It had a log right in front of the tree, and it had purple and red berries that

gathered around that were about that big around, you know, real little. And step out on the bush. And it weren't a bush. it was just separated, and fresh. And Linda smelled them and they're fresh. And somebody picked, and then that log had a hole—

[And then about two or three weeks ago him and Linda here next door went down there. I remember going down there when it were just a young-un, a child?]

It was about like..

[Now I wouldn't go there and get the child myself]

It had a hole about like that with feathers in it—two bird feathers and a clam shell down there. And then..

[And that night he couldn't sleep, neither.]

I couldn't.

[He was scared to death to go to sleep. Cause what you wanna do next Sunday is you and Linda is tromp up and go down there.]

And there was a whole bunch of stuff down there. And like an onion, a fresh onion. Not old but one just fresh pulled up out of the ground, still had dirt on it. And then right near that tree, and I don't know what. And I kept on hearing, I don't know if Linda heard it—I didn't mention it to Linda, though. I didn't mention it to you, either. But I kept on hearing, like, somebody. There weren't many left of us. We were sitting down—there's a bench out there, a wooden bench, very old. And that's where I found some stuff down there, you know, not none of that stuff. But the only thing I found down there was this. I found that down there when me and Linda went down there.

[See years ago there was a bunch of old sailors—Puerto Ricans. I think it was that was drowned. Boat capsized out there or something, years and years and years ago. Before I was ever born, I guess. And they buried them down in there. And a lot of people seen things, they say ghosts. I don't know whether it's ghosts or not.]

Probably is a ghost.

[I don't believe in it maybe if I saw one.]

And I kept on hearing—me and Linda were sitting down. Linda was just

sitting there.

[As teenagers, we used to ramble around a lot and sometimes we'd walk on Sundays down through there.]

Linda was just sitting down there and picking, you know? Just looking around and stuff. And she weren't looking my way. I was just looking straight, you know, at the little bitty path. And I heard some footsteps, and it weren't me and it weren't Linda. Heard footsteps. And it weren't the dog because the dog was sitting near the beach near the water. And the footsteps were crunching away down the path. Kept on crunching, it went *crunch, crunch*, like that. And then, see, first it was sluggish, and then it started running. It turned around and started running. I don't know what it was.

Funny Stories

Track 29: A Trip to Las Vegas. Rex O'Neal and James Barrie Gaskill

And every year we go to Atlantic City, anywhere from six to twelve of us, and we always take oysters and put them in our room cold. And during the day, you can snap on a few oysters.

So we get a couple of styrofoam coolers and put them in there and put ice and newspaper on top of them and wrap them up with duct tape. And when we get to the airport, we say, "Well, here's some more luggage, you know, we got these here coolers wrapped up."

Here you go to Las Vegas and you take a chance to spend anywhere from a thousand to two thousand dollars, instead of buying a fifteen, a ten, fifteen dollar cooler. we got these old styrofoam ones like that. Filled them up with oysters and wrapped tape around it. Dave done that. Dave and Rex.

I reckon it was two o'clock in the morning, something like that, and I looked and they had shooting suitcases, shooting luggage off of one of them, shoots stuff right hard, you know. And I said, "I reckon I better get down there and catch that—if I don't, it's liable to bust."

*James Barrie Gaskill and
his son Morton inspect
crab pots. (Photograph by
Ann Sebrell Ebringhaus)*



We got to Las Vegas. Here come the oysters, you know, where the luggage come down. Box is busted.

This was only three years ago.

The oysters was all over that belt going around. When I seen them, I got the hell out of there. I got up and walked away like I didn't know them. *They was going round and round the belt and I was trying to get them like that. When I did, everybody that was with me, they scampered.*

And so Rex—you know, you can't embarrass him anyway, he's never met a stranger—so Rex, he gets down and he starts picking them up.

So, away go them oysters, they go down like this and then they still come back around, and I'm wondering what I'm going to put them in. Till some

lady comes up and hands me this here box, you know. So they come by and I grab about two hands full of them and away they go again. I say, "Well there they go again." Next time they come by this lady, she jumps in there and starts helping me. Everybody else done left in the meantime. So she jumps there and helps me, and she says, "What are they—clams?" I said, "No, they're oysters."

And then somebody in the airport goes and gets one of these here, those things, like a clothes basket to put them in. And within five minutes, they would go around like this. He had all them tourists helping him grab them. I still stood in the background. I didn't even want anybody to know I was with that group.

And they kept going by about seven or eight times till finally I got them all. And I waited there for that next batch and they was all mixed in with everybody's luggage, those muddy oysters. I thought they was going to run us out of the airport. The other batch never did show up, so I guess they must have busted somewhere else before they got that far.

Track 30: Homemade Wine. Dave Esham

Make meal wine, that's a home brew. I guess we probably started making it about nine, ten years old. We'd use these big glass jugs. They came from the Navy base.

[Fifty gallons?]

No, they weren't fifty gallons, they'd probably hold, I think they'd hold more than five. About seven, eight gallons, ten gallons.

[I know what you mean].

I think they stored ice in them originally, or something. But, anyway, just put some meal, and sugar, and yeast, fill it up with water and sit it out in the woods, put a piece of tar paper over it, or something to let it get good and hot and let it ferment, and after about five or six days start drinking it. You can get a right good buzz off of it too.

Track 31: Dingbatters. James Barrie Gaskill

It originated down in Carteret County first I heard of it. These ones

down in Cedar Island, and places. Anybody like a tourist or anybody around, they called them dingbats. I guess because you know, if you're a tourist, regardless of whether you've got a Ph.D. or what, you always ask stupid questions. I do the same thing. If I go somewhere, I'll ask questions that other people will think are stupid. That what are dingbatters or something. It could have come from the Archie Bunker show, I don't know. On Archie Bunker, remember, he used to call Edith a dingbat, or something. I don't know where he picked up the name at, but for the last fifteen years or so they just started using it.

Track 32: Meehonkey. James Barrie Gaskill

[I've heard it spelled mulehonkey, newhonkey, moohonkey.]

That was sort of like a hide and seek game. We just had teams and you mark off certain areas of the island where it's supposed to hide at and then every so often, you'd holler or honk like a goose or something like that and they would try to find you. And you could keep moving. And there was some trees around here, especially before they cut them down, growing right in front of the store before they put the road in. There was two big cedars, and the honeysuckle was so thick that you could climb as high as this house and roll right through the honeysuckle and never fall through the branches of the tree. Just matted over. And it places like that we'd hide.

Track 33: A Drunk Pig. Essie O'Neal

We had another pig, a little red pig, and he broke—I'll tell you, he broke the pen, and got out of that pen. But what it was, he—a bunch of men had made meal wine. You don't know what meal wine is?

[Yeah, I know what meal wine is.]

They had made this meal wine in a keg or a big five gallon jug or something. And when—they all drink till the drink is all off, they just had the settlings: the meal and the peaches—whatever they put in it. Well, Harry took the settlings and everything and dumped them in the hog trough. And the hog eat them, and he got drunk. You ever seen a drunk hog?

[No.]

I had a sister coming over to my house to help me wash, you know, we had current—we didn't have running water. And this hog, he run over up and down over the house and jumped up on the porch and jumped in running and couldn't catch him. And everybody running around and couldn't catch the hog. And he was a-running and running, you know, all around—just crazy, turning somersaults. My sister had started, there, was gonna help me wash. And just as she got to the gate, the hog was coming out. I said, "Stop!" I said, "Just stop! Wait!" And she didn't know what I meant and all that time that hog running and he run right through her legs and turned her over backwards and came on down the road. And she screamed—it scared her. And we didn't see that hog in two days. He never come back or nothing. And so Harry, he was working somewhere on a house, you know, and help shingling roofs or something like that. Harry said, "Well, I don't know." I said, "He never did come back." He said, "He didn't come to his pen?" I said, "No." And he had told me if the pig come back and got in that pen, run out with a hammer and nail him up so he couldn't get out. So, it was two days, and finally two Coast Guard boys come to the door and knocked on the door. I went and they said, one of them said, "Harry lives here, don't he?" I said "Harry O'Neal?" He said, "I would like to have him to come down to the Coast Guard station." And I thought something really bad was wrong. I said, "Well, I'll tell him—he's working—I'll tell him when he comes back." He said, "We want to see if he can identify a hog." And I said, "Well, I'll tell him when he gets off work." When he come from work, I told him, I said, "They want you down the Coast Guard station." "For what?" he said. I said, "They got a hog down there and they want you to identify it." He said "What?" He said, "I better go down, then." So, he left and it was that hog of his. They had spotted him from the cupola, swimming. He was swimming towards Portsmouth. They saw this red thing and thought it was somebody red-headed. They thought it was a person. And they went after it with a P.T. boat. They went after it, said there was a person overboard

over there. And when they after that hog, they thought it was a person. And it was over there by Hog Shoal—they got a shoal named Hog Shoal. That's where the hog was at, when they got him off of the hog shoal. And they brought home, put him in the pen. Well, he went out there and poured his food in his trough, you know, like he's supposed to have, like mealings and stuff. He wouldn't eat it. He just laid there and slept. And all that day, he didn't eat nothing. And just laid and slept. And we had to go dump that old food out and put new in, and he still wouldn't eat it. He still laid there. So when Harry came home again that evening for supper, he said, "Did he eat anything, did the hog eat anything?" I said, "No he ain't." I said, "He ain't moved." And I said, "He's still laying there." He said, "Well, if you had a hangover like he's got."

Track 34: A Practical Joke. Kenny Balance

[One time they toilet papered his house and, there must've been a case of toilet paper strewn. I mean, it looked like it snowed. I mean, that was]

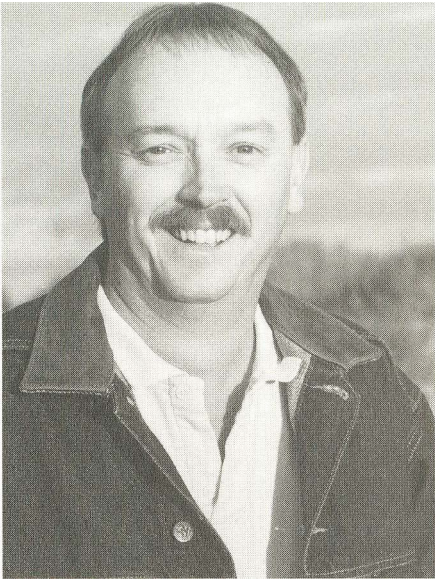
It must have been in September. I come home from work—

That was hard work. Somebody need to take a picture of that. That one really made me mad. Cause it was two Coast Guard guys stopped by and said, "Are you gonna watch tv tonight?" And I said, "No—"

[They did it on your cook stove, too.]

I had the pilot light lit on the cook stove in the kitchen. And all that pilot light would've had to done and it would've went up in flames. But they done it, at that house over there. I went Three Quarter Time to a dance that night. When I come home, I had to go in the yard, get a stick and beat my way in the house. I bagged up seven big garbage bags of toilet paper, and I carried it to the station. And I went down the hall, and I beat on every door and runned every boy in there up. I said, "Now I want to know who in the hell put this toilet paper in my house." Not a damn one of them—they laughed and laughed. Half of them cussed me out cause I woke them up. It was one o'clock in the morning. Next morning, I loaded it all up and I carried it down there—Ronnie Vann was the chief—and I said, "I don't know who did it, but I want you to see that whoever did it

Ken Ballance pauses for a moment as he waits for the ferry. (Photograph by Ann Sebrell Ebringhaus)



has to wipe theirself on all seven bags of this, cause it come from down here." Let me tell you, it was someone and Al Jacobson. And he made them take a bag of that at a time and set it in the stalls until every damn bit of it was gone. But I came home—it was in September, I come home. Wes was coming down that night, and two friends of mine was down here from New Jersey. And I come from work—they went out to dinner, I had gone to work and I got off that night. They came home and said, "Oh, Kenny's having a party. Somebody's giving Kenny a surprise party." And they thought it was streamers. And Joe said, "Well this ain't streamers, it's toilet paper." And one of the girls that works for me from San Francisco, she and one of the guys down there that was a seasonal ranger had been here. And I mean to tell you, this house was wrecked. Not only up here, but upstairs. The refrigerator they had wrapped all my fruit, my vegetables in the refrigerator that was all wrapped.

Track 35: Opening Oysters. Elizabeth Howard

I had known some girls and boys, too, that went away to school, and they would not tell anybody they were from Ocracoke.

[*Why?*]

I guess that we were isolated and maybe somebody had laughed at something they'd said, or I don't know why, but I've always told them I was from Ocracoke. Now, I've ever told them anywhere else. And people did not know what Ocracoke was. They did not. When I went to school in Angier, my daddy sent a barrel full of oysters in the shell to me, and I gave them all away in that neighborhood. Well, course, they didn't know how to open oysters, and nobody'd ever had a oyster knife. They had to use any kind of knife they had. They'd hit them with a hammer to break the shell. And they had never been to an island, as I far as I was concerned. In fact, even up in Maryland, one time this lady found out that—she asked me, I think, to tell her where I was from, and I told her Ocracoke Island. And she said, “You live on an island?” And, I said, “Yes, I do.” And she sort of frowned, like, and she thought that was terrible: “Well, what do you eat?” And I said, “Well honey, you name it and we eat it.” And I don't know anyplace that I have been—now I haven't been out of the U.S.A—but I've been everywhere, I think, just about—I haven't been to Texas and the Western states. But I have never been anywhere where people eat any better than they do here on the island.



*Maurice Ballance relaxes
on the "pizer" with his
guitar. (Photograph by
Ann Sebrell Lebringhaus)*

Music of Ocracoke

Track 36: Goodnight Irene, The Old Pine Tree, She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain

"Goodnight Irene"

Irene goodnight, goodnight Irene,
Goodnight Irene, goodnight Irene,
I will see you in my dreams. Yeah!
Cause sometimes I live in the country,
Sometimes I live in town,
Sometimes I have a great notion
to jump in the river and drown.
Oh yeah!

“The Old Pine Tree”

When we cut down the old pine tree,
Haul it away to the mill,
We go gather up pine
For this sweet gal of mine,
When we cut down the old pine tree.

“She’ll Be Coming Round the Mountain”

She’ll be comin around the mountain when she come, oh yeah!
Comin around the mountain when she come.
She’ll be comin around the mountain,
She’ll be comin around the mountain
She’ll be comin around the mountain when she come.
She(’ll) be drivin six white horses when she come,
She(’ll) be drivin six white horses when she come.
She’ll be drivin six white horses,
She’ll be drivin six white horses,
She’ll be drivin six white horses when she come, ●h yeah..

*Rex O'Neal shares
some island phrases
with Walt Wolfram and
Natalie Shilling-Estes.*

*(Photograph by
Herman Lankford)*



One of Ocracoke's greatest cultural resources is its language – from the fabled stories of the past (and present) to the distinct sounds of the “hoi toide” brogue. In this collection, we have tried to preserve a small segment of this endangered language tradition, based on conversations with “O’cockers” by staff members of the North Carolina Language and Life Project from 1992 through 1999. For community members, we hope that it will inspire fond memories of the unique people and events that define Ocracoke life. For “dingbatters,” we hope that it will provide a glimpse of the rich language heritage that has symbolized the culture for almost three centuries.

– Walt Wolfram
William C. Friday Distinguished Professor
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North Carolina
Language and Life Project



Ocracoke
Preservation Society