

# Down East Community Tour

Prepared by Pam Morris for the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum & Heritage Center

## Overview

- “Down East” is a collection of 13 communities located northeast of the North River Bridge in Carteret County. All of these are part of what has been recently designated, “The Outer Banks National Scenic Byway.”
- These communities were settled in the late seventeenth century – mid eighteenth century. Farming, hunting and fishing-related activities were the primary occupations.
- Every community had several general stores at different time periods.
- Every community is home to several churches except Gloucester / Straits, who share one church.
- The museum interprets the 13 DE communities, plus Cape Lookout / Shackleford Banks, Portsmouth Village, the “Promise’ Land” district of Morehead City, and Salter Path. Natives of the Promise’ Land and Salter Path [along with several DE communities] are descendants of people who lived on the Cape Lookout / Shackleford Banks communities.
- “Down Easters” are well known for their “old English” accent or “brogue.” Native peoples of Salter Path, Promise’ Land, Ocracoke, Hatteras and Wanchese / Manteo share variations on this speech pattern. They also use particular words and use of word groupings, in a distinctive manner. This is a result of relative isolation for many years and is a means of recognizing each other as Banker people. This dialect is also found in the Eastern Shore of Virginia and Maryland; Down East, Maine and in Cortez, Florida, a community founded by the people of Carteret County. The film “The Carolina Brogue” now playing on the second floor television, is a good synopsis of local dialect.
- All of the communities had their own schools, including high schools, that were gradually consolidated into the three remaining pre-k through eighth grade schools located in Atlantic, Smyrna and Harkers Island. All high school age students were transferred to East Carteret High School in 1965.

*Beginning of tour, generally north to south:*

## Portsmouth Village

- Portsmouth was incorporated in 1753.
- It was organized as a lightering and fishing community. Lightering is the transfer of goods from ships to smaller and shallower-draft vessels.
- At its height, the population of Portsmouth was about 800 residents, prior to the Civil War. By 1870, the population was about 300 people. The last two residents moved off of the island in 1971 after the death of Henry Pigott, the famed African-American man who lived his entire life on the Island. He had helped the two elderly women, Marian Gray Babb and \_\_\_\_\_ stay on their Island home until their 70s.
- Portsmouth Island is the northern-most portion of Cape Lookout National Seashore. The park opened new exhibitions at Portsmouth Village in April 2010 that includes several homes, the school, the post office and the Lifesaving Station. There are more Portsmouth exhibits next door at the Park Service Visitors Center.
- Portsmouth Homecoming is held in April of even-numbered years and is supported by the non-profit group, Friends of Portsmouth Island.
- A passenger ferry runs from Ocracoke to Portsmouth, a second-generation family business now run by Rudy and Donald Austin.

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## Cedar Island

- Cedar Island is home to the Cedar Island – Ocracoke ferry, run by the State of North Carolina and is an employer of many Down East people.

- There are many species of waterfowl that stop in the Pamlico Sound and northern Core Sound near Cedar Island. There are several hunting guides located here for that reason.
- Cedar Island is home to the Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge.
- Hog Island is located to the east of Cedar Island. The community of Lupton was located there, complete with homes, stores, churches and a US Post Office. The storm of 1933 forced residents off of the island.
- Cedar Island is home to one of Down's East few remaining fish houses, Quality Seafood.

#### **Atlantic**

- Atlantic is home to one of the first public high schools in Carteret County. In 1905 the people of Atlantic incorporated to raise tax money to pay for the school. The school today has student enrollment of pre-k through eighth grade.
- The mailboat "Aleta" ran from Atlantic to Ocracoke until a ferry took its place.
- Atlantic's D. Mason's Store was the original location of the Atlantic-Ocracoke ferry landing.
- Atlantic High School was well known for its baseball and basketball teams.
- There is one fish house and two clam houses left in Atlantic. Luther Smith & Son Seafood Company, Drum Inlet Seafood and Joe Huber's aquaculture operation. At one time, Clayton Fulcher Seafood and Luther Smith & Son Seafood, two of the largest fish houses in North Carolina.
- Clayton Fulcher, Sr. was a founder of the North Carolina Fisheries Association and Billy Smith served for many years as board member and chairman until his death. Today his wife Janice Smith continues to serve as a board member. Billy and Janice have also been major contributors to this museum.
- Atlantic is home to the only vehicle ferry service to north Core Banks. The ferry company also operated several fishing camp cabins for many years. These camps are presently being maintained and operated by Cape Lookout National Seashore.
- The Pilentary Hunting Club, owned by the Mott family, was located across Core Sound from Atlantic and the caretakers were from Atlantic. Franklin Delano Roosevelt hunted at the Pilentary while he was the U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The Pilentary Hunting Club washed away during the Storm of 1933.
- There was a US Coast Guard Station located on Core Banks near Drum Inlet across from Atlantic.
- Today Atlantic Harbor is one of the most picturesque to be found Down East with many old workboats built by well-known Atlantic boatbuilder Ambrose Fulcher.

#### **Sea Level**

- Sea Level Hospital was the first and only hospital ever built Down East, established in the 1950s by the Taylor Brothers of Sea Level who were very successful with their shipping and salt companies. The hospital purchased by Duke University in the 1980s and then sold to the county and was converted to an extended care facility, known as Taylor's Extended Care. There is also a health clinic and pharmacy located on the site, which has been in place since the hospital was built in the early 1950s.
- Sea Level is home to Sailor's Snug Harbor, relocated from Manhattan, New York in the late 1970s. "Snug Harbor" was established by (the) Alexander Hamilton after the Revolutionary War as a home for Merchant Marines who didn't have any where to go. It is now known as Snug Harbor on Nelson Bay and is an upscale assisted living facility.
- Sea Level was home to Valentine Taylor's oyster house in the 1930s.
- T.A. Taylor and Sons is the main fish house left in Sea Level.
- Sea Level is known for its cedar and canvas decoy makers, including Colon Taylor, John Lupton and Harry Hamilton

#### **Stacy**

- Stacy was once home to more decoys carvers than any other community Down East.
- Mitchell Fulcher is the most well-known carver Down East and his decoys are the most valuable. He is followed by Eldon Willis, Elmer Salter and Homer Fulcher.
- Stacy is the smallest Down East community, with a population of about 200 people.
- NC Heritage Award winner, Homer Fulcher, a menhaden captain and decoy carver was from Stacy.
- Stacy was comprised of two communities: 1. Masontown (north) and 2. Piney Point (south.)
- The commercial fishery of shedding soft crabs was brought to Stacy from Smith Island, Maryland in the late 1800s, probably the first in North Carolina to do so.
- Hurricane Isabel in 2003 damaged many homes in the community of Stacy and several others. Its long-term effects can be seen today with many of the homes having been elevated to hopefully avoid flooding in the future.

### **Davis**

- Davis Shore was shortened to Davis when the US Post Office was chartered. Many local people still refer to Davis as Davis Shore.
- Davis was home to the most hunting and fishing guides at one time Down East. Their homes served as lodges during the season. Babe Ruth and other notable people hunted with Davis Shore guides.
- There was a World War II US Army Camp located in Davis.
- The Carteret Gun & Rod Club, now the Core Banks Club, was formerly located on Core Banks across Core Sound from Davis. It was built by people from Davis and staffed by people from Davis and Stacy. "The Clubhouse" is presently located in Davis. The large photograph located in the display shows North Carolina artist Bob Timberlake hunting with several Davis citizens and members of the Club.
- Many well known decoy carvers lived in Davis, including Ammie Paul and Henry Murphy.
- Davis Shore was also a crossroads community for Down East with several businesses. Today the Davis Shore Provision Company has been established, formerly Johnny Davis' store.
- Davis is also known as the home of the "Crab Pot Christmas Tree," a folk art adaption of a working crab pot and a Christmas treat created by Down East native, Nicky Harvey.
- Several vehicle ferries have operated out of Davis to access south Core Banks. Currently, there are two in business. Several Core Banks fishing camp businesses were run by the people of Davis. Presently Cape Lookout National Seashore runs the camps, formerly known as Alger Willis Fishing Camps.
- James Styron's Fish Company is the last remaining fish house on Davis. The second community harbor in Carteret County is located here.

### **\*Davis Ridge and Davis Island\***

- Davis Ridge is a part of mainland Davis Shore and was home to an African-American family of Davis' who were former slaves. They lived in their own community, built menhaden boats and had their own menhaden plant. Sutton Davis built his boat, the *Shamrock* (1899,) a menhaden boat on Davis Island. After the Storm of 1933, they moved to Beaufort where they became the first African-American menhaden captains in the county's formerly vast menhaden fleet.
- Davis Island is located between Davis Ridge and Williston and Smyrna. Davis Island is home to a large private residence, caretaker's home and several barns. The main house was built by the men of Davis Shore around 1920 and is patterned after a French Chateau. It once served as a private hunting club.
- Davis Island was settled by Joseph and Mary Wicker in 1723. Joseph left the island to his daughter and her husband, William and Mary Wicker Davis, where they lived until they died. (William's will was probated in 1756.) Davis Island is named after them.

**Williston**

- The former name of Williston was “Springfield” and was changed when the US Post Office was established by John Williston.
- Williston was a prominent boat building center in the late 1800s – early 1900s. Many sharpies were built during this time and used for oystering and the menhaden fishery. Some of these were the *Regulator* (1882,) the *Manteo* (1890,) and the *Sickle* (1910.) Notable boatbuilders from this period were Elijah W. Piner and Abner D. Willis.
- Hi-Tide Boatworks was located in Williston during the 1950s - early 1970s. Operated by NC Heritage Award winner, Julian Guthrie (from Harkers Island), he built workboats, yachts, and skiffs at this facility located at Elmer Willis’ clam house and general store. This was the original site of Jarrett Bay Boatworks (the boathouse was located on Jarrett Bay.)
- Willis Brothers Seafood was owned and operated by Elmer “Clam King” Willis. Willis Bros. specialized in clams and was one of the largest suppliers of clams to the Heinz Food Company. Four North Carolina Governors attended Clam Bakes at Elmer Willis clam house. Elmer and his wife Pearl helped local schools raise money by holding clam bakes at the schools.
- Another well known boat builder from Williston was Elmo Wade who built menhaden boats and other vessels.
- There was several grist mills located in Williston and saw mills that supplied local boat builders.

**Smyrna**

- Smyrna is home to Smyrna School, the largest Down East School, and has been for generations. Today it is a Pre K – 8 school.
- The former name of Smyrna was “Summerfield” and was changed when the US Post Office was established.
- Smyrna is home to the Down East Library and several other businesses.
- Smyrna was home to Dr. Josh “Shake It” Davis, physician and apothecary who made his own medicine.
- Smyrna was home to the only drive-in theater located Down East and memories of local drive-in restaurants “The Red Rooster” and Willis’ Drive-In are still beloved by many local baby boomers.
- Smyrna, like Williston was an epicenter of boatbuilding in the late 1800s – early 1900s, building Core Sound Sharpies. Sonny Williamson’s book, Sailing with Grandpa, lists 78 sailing vessels built in Smyrna between 1872 and 1907 with 28 boatbuilders also listed in the Smyrna Township.
- A marine railway was operated at one time by Lige Piner.

**Bettie**

- Bettie is known as the “Gateway” to Down East. It is the first community traveling northeast via Highway 70 as you cross over the North River Bridge.
- Bettie is a farming community, with cabbage being one of the main cash crops. In the past, many migrant workers were housed in Bettie as they worked in the fields at harvest time.
- There is a bakery and produce stand located in Bettie that sells local produce and homemade baked goods.
- Bettie was home to an Oyster Bar & Restaurant on one side of the North River Bridge and a store on the other side. These were heavily damaged during a Hurricane Hazel in 1954 but the posts can still be seen beside the bridge.
- The original name of the community was “Simpson.”
- The first North River Bridge was built in the 1920s.
- The name “Bettie” comes from the postmaster at the time the community’s post office was established.

### **Otway**

- Otway was named for Captain Otway Burns, an American Privateer during the War of 1812, and his ship, the *Snap Dragon*. Otway Burns is buried in the Old Beaufort Burying Ground on Ann Street. There is a canon on top of his grave.
- Otway is one of the main crossroads communities and the business center of Down East.
- Otway was home to Decator Gillikin, said to be the strongest man Down East. There are many stories written and told about Decator, similar in nature to Paul Bunyan stories.
- Otway is a farm-based community.
- Otway is home to the Crow Hill Hunting Preserve, a members-only hunt club.

### **Gloucester**

- Gloucester was established by tall ship Capt. Joe Pigott in 1910 when he was granted a charter for a US Post Office. Prior to that, Gloucester was a part of Straits.
- Gloucester was named after Gloucester, Mass. where Capt. Pigott had visited in his extensive travels.
- A vehicle ferry ran between Gloucester and Harkers Island prior to the construction of the Harkers Island Bridge in 1941.
- Gloucester was home to Nat Lee Smith's boatyard, Carolina Boatworks. Nat Smith built almost all of the boats for the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, now the NC Division of Marine Fisheries, from the 1950s until the early 1970s. One of the best known Nat Smith boats was the *Raleigh Bay*, a 64-foot yacht built for the state.
- Gloucester residents Barbara and Bryan Blake spearhead an annual Mardi Gras event held in Gloucester each February.
- Gloucester is home to Pigott Marine Railways, one of the last marine railways left in North Carolina.
- Gloucester Community Club is one of the oldest of its kind in the county and had an annual BBQ Chicken fundraiser that supports many community projects and maintains its facility.

### **Straits**

- Straits was first settled in 1713.
- The Straits church was organized in 1751 as an Anglican Congregation which was taken over by the Methodist Church during the American Revolution. It was then chartered as the Straits Methodist Church in 1778. The Methodist Church at Straits was also the home church of the Jones Chapel Methodist Church located on Shackleford Banks in the 1800s. The old Straits School Building is now part of Straits Methodist Church.
- There were three grist mills located in Straits and Gloucester.
- The first Masonic Lodge in Carteret County was located in Straits Township, instituted in 1798, and was paid for in English pounds.
- Straits was an early center of boatbuilding in Carteret County. Sonny Williamson's book, [Sailing with Grandpa](#), lists 30 sailing vessels built in Straits between 1865 and 1901 and 7 boatbuilders in the Straits Township.

### **Marshallberg**

- Marshallberg is home port to many commercial fishermen. The first community harbor in Carteret County is located in Marshallberg and was dredged by the Corps of Engineers in the 1950s. Today it is known as the Marshallberg Harbor and is looked after by the Marshallberg Community Club.
- Marshallberg is well-known for boatbuilding and was home to M.W. Willis Boatworks, a renowned boat yard. Ray Davis Boatworks was also located in Marshallberg but not on the same property. Jarrett Bay Boatworks, after it left the Williston site, moved to Marshallberg Harbor near when the old M. W. Willis Boatworks had been. Jarrett Bay Boatworks grew

significantly while on Marshallberg merging Down East Boats (owned by the Willis Family) and Sleepy Creek Boatworks (owned by the Davis Family.) Jarrett Bay Boatworks moved to Core Creek (near Beaufort) and founded the Jarrett Bay Marine Industrial Park, now home to many boat manufacturing facilities and support businesses. Marshallberg was home to the Graham Academy, a college preparatory boarding school in the late 1800s and instilled a deep appreciation for education in this community. Marshallberg is still known for its large number of school teachers

Marshallberg was home to Capt. Fred Gillikin, at one time, the oldest living US Coast Guard veteran. He was honored for his service on his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday by the Coast Guard.

#### **Harkers Island**

- Harkers Island is a nationally-recognized boat building community.
- Harkers Island is the largest Down East community, with approximately 1500 residents, a large percentage of them being part-time.
- At one time, Harkers Island was listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as having the most churches per capita. Currently, there are seven churches located on Harkers Island.
- Harkers Island was given by Kings Grant to Thomas Sparrow in 1714.
- Electricity was established on the island in 1939 and the bridge opening in 1941. Before that time, a ferry to Gloucester served Harkers Island as well as a mailboat to Beaufort. The last mailboat serving Harkers Island was named "The Pet."
- Many island residents trace their ancestry back to whalers living on Shackleford Banks.
- Native Islanders are well-known for their love of hunting, cooking and eating loons.
- Harkers Island is home to two NC Heritage Award winners: 1. Julian Guthrie, boatbuilder and 2. James Allen Rose, boatbuilder, model boatbuilder and musician.
- Harkers Island is also known for its strong music tradition. Ivey Scott, legendary fiddle player from the mid-1900s played for dances up and down the coast of NC and made famous the ballad, "The Booze Yacht."
- Harkers Island's "Island Born & Bred" cookbook (published in 1987) captures many of the stories, legends and history of Harkers Island.
- The National Park Service came to Harkers Island in the 1960s and has greatly affected the economy of the Island. The CSWM&HC is located on NPS property and works w/ Cape Lookout National Seashore to provide education, interpretation, documentation and preservation of the cultural and natural resources of this region.
- A County Harbor is located on Harkers Island, just over the drawbridge.

#### **Cape Lookout / Shackleford**

- The first Cape Lookout Lighthouse was built in 1812, and then deemed too short. The present lighthouse was constructed and lamp lit on November 1, 1857. The Cape Lookout Lighthouse is 167 feet tall and is painted with a "Diagonal Checkers" pattern. The majority of Cape Lookout Lighthouse Keepers were local residents.
- Cape Lookout Village is located near the lighthouse and is on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Cape Lookout and nearby Shackleford Banks were home to several communities / family groups, collectively known as "Diamond City" A series of storms in the late 1800s gradually drove residents off of the island, with the turning point being the Storm of 1899. These residents moved primarily to Harkers Island, the Promise' Land in Morehead City, Marshallberg, and Salter Path.
- The residents of Cape Lookout / Shackleford Banks communities were fishermen and whalers. They often named their whales and perhaps the most famous one landed on Shackleford Banks hangs in the North Carolina Museum of Natural History. Its name is the "Mayflower Whale."
- Before the Storm of '33 there was no Barden's Inlet separating Shackleford and Cape Lookout, but rather a small "ditch" that folks could walk across. The strong tide during the storm

"broke open" the inlet that was later dredged into the deep water inlet it is today. It was named for US Senator Graham Barden who helped get the work done.

- Cape Lookout was first home to the Cape Lookout Lifesaving Station, the Lighthouse Service and then the home of a US Coast Guard station from until 1982 when the station became part of Cape Lookout National Seashore. The station was particularly active during WWII. There was a small store located near the lighthouse in the 1950s through the 1970s run by Les and Sallie Moore that catered to fishermen and hunters on Cape Lookout. They also owned and operated a few fishing camps on the site. Sallie was known for her vast collections of shells, bottles and other articles that washed up on the beach.
- On the west end of Shackleford there is a small cemetery maintained by the NPS, one of the last remnants of the communities that was known as Diamond City.

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### Promise' Land

- The Promise' Land was developed as part of the Sheppard Point Land Company property, later to become Morehead City, named after Governor John Motely Morehead. During the 1880s and 1890s, fishermen bought land and began to move from Shackleford Banks, after a series of hurricanes. Houses were disassembled and floated across the sound and reconstructed in the Promise' Land.
- The story relating to the term "Promise' Land" has been associated to this part of Morehead City has many variations, but most agree that it was the safe high ground (as compared to storm-wretched Shackleford) that made it seem like a "Promised" Land for Banks residents. The reference to the hymn by the same name is also part of the tradition.
- The boundaries of the Promise' Land are somewhat sketchy but are generally between 12<sup>a</sup> - 15<sup>a</sup> and Evans St to Bogue Sound.
- The Promise' Land remained a community of fishermen and boatbuilders until the very recent past.
- The Promise' Land was home to Kib Guthrie's Store, the center of activity. It was run by Kilby "Kib" Guthrie, Jr. It leaned to the left quite severely and was torn down after he died.
- Gretchen Guthrie Guthrie's "Carteret Love Song," a collection of poetry and prose, tells of the close cultural connections between Shackleford and the Promise' Land.

### Salter Path

- Salter Path is located on Bogue Banks / Bogue Sound and was one of several "Paths" named after families who "wore paths" from the sound side shore to their homes to the ocean. Other named place paths included: Rice Path, Bell Cove, Yellow Hill and Bill's Point.
- "Salter Pathers" are descendents from the Shackleford Banks / Diamond City communities just like their cousins at Harkers Island, Promise' Land, Marshallberg and throughout Carteret County.
- There are still many natives of Salter Path who are connected to the seafood industry. The largest seafood company is Homer Smith Seafood, with a plant in Beaufort that will soon be converted to a marina.
- Salter Path is well-known for its fall beach seine fishery for roe mullets. There were fish camps located up and down Bogue Banks before it was developed. All were named for fish crews that worked each area of the Banks where the work of hauling nets and fish was carried out by hand. Today only a remnant of this fishing tradition remains with nets being hauled by tractors and the catch loaded onto trucks.
- Salter Path is the only unincorporated community on Bogue Banks. Only a small numbers of homes in coves of oak trees bare resemblance to the Salter Path of only a few years ago.
- Native Salter Pathers (like Harkers Islanders) are well-known for their love of hunting, cooking and eating loons.

- Salter Path has a rich tradition of sacred music, much like the music found on Harkers Island, another cultural connection that continues today.