



It's official!

The lighthouse has been deeded to **Outer Banks Conservationists.**

Now help us get back to work!

An expensive 2-year application process and a hold on our restoration funds means we need your help.

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TYPES OF SPONSORSHIP

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Family: Five free visits to the Currituck Beach Lighthouse and annual newsletter \$50

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P.O. Box 970, Manteo, NC 27954

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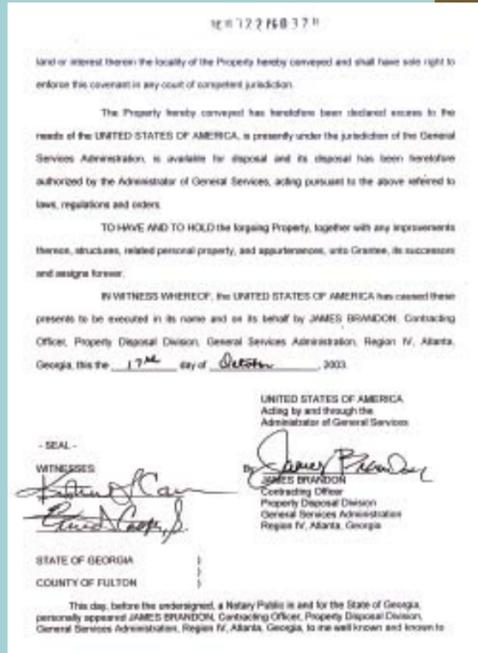


Photo Credit: Sandy Semans

On October 17th, 2003 the Deed to the Currituck Beach Lighthouse was transferred to Outer Banks Conservationists, Inc. Bill Parker (left) and John Wilson are shown registering the deed with Charlene Dowdy (right) accepting registration fees.

The Mission of Outer Banks Conservationists...

...is to protect natural, cultural, and historic resources through preservation and conservation of a sense of place, and through public education, interpretation, and outreach, to instill these values in others for the benefit of future generations.

Outer Banks Conservationists, Inc.
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Old News

Circa 2003
The Latest from Outer Banks Conservationists
Keepers of the Currituck Beach Lighthouse

CURRITUCK BEACH LIGHTHOUSE DEED TRANSFERRED TO OBC

Following a year of uncertain fate, the Currituck Beach Lighthouse is now safe in the hands of its preservers, the Outer Banks Conservationists, Inc. (OBC). The deed to the lighthouse was transferred from the federal government to OBC on October 17, 2003.

OBC founder John Wilson and board chairman Bill Parker went to Atlanta to execute the deed, then witnessed the official recording of the transfer at the Currituck County Register of Deeds.

"Now we can carry on with our primary goals," said Parker. "To see the lighthouse well-preserved and to interpret its history for the public."

Outer Banks Conservationists was formed in 1980 with the primary purpose of saving the Currituck Beach Lighthouse compound when it was at its worst state of repair. Since that date, the all-volunteer group has leased the light station from the Coast Guard and the state of North Carolina and spent more than \$4 million in private funds restoring the historical and cultural landmark and its outbuildings. OBC opened the lighthouse for public climbing in 1990 and now more than 100,000 people visit the site every year.

The Currituck Beach Lighthouse was

one of nearly 300 national lighthouses declared surplus by the U.S. Coast Guard and made available to public and private interests under the National Historic Lighthouse Preservation Act of 2000. Both Outer Banks Conservationists and Currituck County applied for ownership of the Currituck Beach Lighthouse in February 2003.

Wildlife and Parks with the U.S. DOI, Craig Manson, again ruled in favor of OBC on each of the four points of consideration: preservation and maintenance, use, financial and management.

The transfer of the lighthouse to a nonprofit organization was a cause for celebration for lighthouse stewards around the nation. The decision is encouraging because it clearly means that nonprofits are on equal footing with governmental bodies in the quest for lighthouse ownership, and that the best stewards for the job will be chosen.

However, the Currituck Beach Lighthouse transfer spurred a 2-year saga that serves as an example that not all of the lighthouse exchanges will be simple. While other lighthouses have been conveyed without event, OBC encountered numerous hurdles in the process.

Rep. Walter Jones Jr., R-N.C., stood in the way of the transfer many times, with a variety of maneuvers involving a number of federal agencies. The transfer was finally accomplished with the help of Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., who demanded that the General Services Administration explain why the agency had not transferred the deed when told to

do so by the Department of Interior.

In the final hours, just before the Currituck Beach Lighthouse was finally about to change hands, Jones delivered a final blow. Acting through Homeland Security, a stipulation was inserted in the deed that OBC pay for an exhaustive

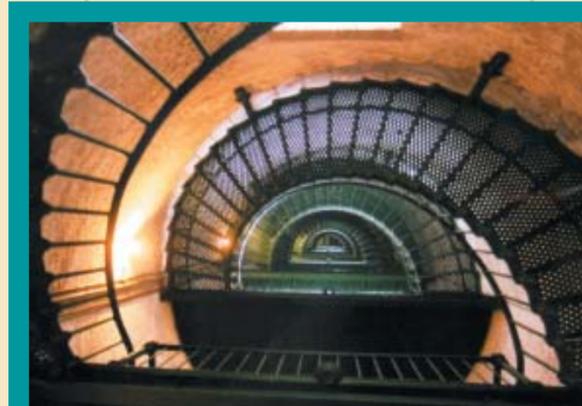


Photo Credit: Lloyd Childers

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The Department of Interior rated the two applications in March 2003 (with OBC receiving a score of 97 and Currituck County scoring 33) and recommended that the lighthouse be awarded to OBC. Currituck County appealed the decision, but the Assistant Secretary for Fish and

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Keeper's Log, Nov. 2003



Photo Credit: Barbara Solow

Meet the Keepers,
John Birkholz and Jenn Barr

It's been a little more than a year since longtime Light Keeper Lloyd Childers retired and new keepers Jenn Barr and John Birkholz took over the day-to-day operations at Currituck Beach Lighthouse.

Jenn and John came on as keepers in the midst of the deed-transfer conflict, so their future, like that of the Currituck Beach Lighthouse, was murky for most of their first year of employment. Not knowing the outcome of the decision, they spent the last year carrying on the lighthouse business as normal, but they were wary of making long-range plans or starting big projects. After an eventful year of riding the ups and downs of the decision-making process, now that the deed has been transferred to OBC, Jenn and John are finally secure in their jobs and are looking forward to their future at Currituck Beach Lighthouse.

A lively, adventurous couple who met in remote North Dakota, Jenn and John share the duties of running the lighthouse. Their individual skills dovetail perfectly in the work of modern-day light keeping. Jenn, as Executive Director and Site Keeper, works on the business end. She manages the site and handles the administrative work, hires, trains and oversees a staff of about 15, keeps visitors happy, and schedules tours and weddings.

John, as Light Keeper, does the physical labor. He does all the landscaping, repairs

the historic buildings, makes sure the light is constantly working, prepares for storms, cleans the lighthouse windows and performs any other maintenance that is needed on site.

Maintenance at the Currituck Beach Lighthouse compound is continual because all of the buildings are nearly 130 years old: "As soon as one rotten board is replaced, we find another one," says John.

Everyone wonders how this young couple landed their jobs at the Currituck Beach Lighthouse and how they managed to find work together.

Before moving to the Outer Banks in October of 2002, they lived and worked in Chapel Hill. Jenn, who has a history of work at nonprofit organizations, was working in management at a domestic violence center. John, who had worked as a teacher and an assistant principal, was working as a building contractor. When the Light Keeper job opened up at Currituck Beach Lighthouse, one of the Outer Banks Conservationists board members from Chapel Hill thought of Jenn's capabilities as a nonprofit manager and mentioned it to her. As it turned out, OBC was looking for ways to have repairs and maintenance done in a more timely manner, leading to OBC's interest in hiring John as well. OBC found them to be the perfect team for the job.

Jenn and John say there is no typical day at the Currituck Beach Lighthouse. With so many people on site all the time - up to 1,000 climbers per day in the summer and more just wandering around the site - they can never predict what's going to happen. Visitors show up wanting to propose to their girlfriends at the top of the tower. Ghost fanatics want to know about the rumored specter in the Keepers' House. Lighthouse lovers want to talk towers and ask questions all day. Errant wild horses show up on site to nibble grass.

"That's what's nice about the job, the variety of things we do," says John.

One thing John and Jenn definitely try to do every day is climb the lighthouse, often more than once a day, something they definitely have in common with all the Currituck Beach Lighthouse keepers before them.

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the front page

government audit, even though OBC had recently completed an audit by the U.S. Coast Guard. In addition it was required that all remaining funds collected from lighthouse admissions be held in escrow by the Federal government.

OBC had \$180,000 of unspent monies collected from lighthouse admissions set aside for lighthouse renovations this winter. Plans for renovations will have to be delayed until the issue is resolved or new monies are raised.

"Of course I'm very pleased that OBC will continue to be the long-term steward of the Currituck Beach Lighthouse," said Parker. "I'm only discouraged to learn that Congressman Walter Jones may be successful in getting Homeland Security to take this year's admission money that we had set aside for lighthouse restoration with the lighthouse closed for the winter."

Parker said that OBC will survive this setback no matter what the outcome, but that he worries for the owners of other lighthouses, especially those in remote places with little income from admissions.

Cullen Chambers, a lighthouse preservationist and director of the Tybee Island Lighthouse in Georgia, agrees.

"The actions taken by Mr. Jones now put at risk funds that were set aside by groups who have a well-thought-out long-range plan for major future work, and will force those stewards to start from scratch to build up the reserve funds required for projects," Chambers told the *Outer Banks Sentinel* in October. "Mr. Jones' actions have endangered all lighthouse transfers and have an adverse effect on every lighthouse group."

Meanwhile, OBC is carrying on business as usual at the Currituck Beach Lighthouse, welcoming visitors and maintaining one of America's great coastal treasures thanks to all of the support and concern from lighthouse supporters during the long process.

ETHERIDGE FARMSTEAD RESTORATION CONTINUES

Outer Banks Conservationists' historic preservation project on Roanoke Island, the old Etheridge Farmstead, is progressing with the completion of the farmhouse restoration and the addition of numerous reconstructed outbuildings.

The Etheridge house, one of the oldest homes on Roanoke Island, is a two-story frame structure that was built sometime between 1840 and 1850. The home was part of the 105-acre Etheridge family farm in 1899. The site surrounding the house is part of an even older 150-acre tract acquired by Jesse Etheridge in 1783.

The house and a half-acre tract were given to OBC by fifth- and sixth-generation Etheridge descendants several years ago. OBC later acquired additional land around the house, including the family cemetery.

With the help of architectural historians, an archaeologist and a restoration expert, OBC has been restoring the homeplace setting to its earliest appearance. The farmhouse restoration is complete, and several reproduction buildings are nearing completion.

The new buildings are historically accurate reproductions of those that would have been on a farm like the Etheridges' in the mid-nineteenth century. A barn, a smokehouse, slave quarters, an outhouse, a kitchen, a dairy, a corn crib and a livestock barn fulfilled the functional needs of running this family farm.

When the site is finished, the Etheridge Farmstead will open to the public as an interpretive museum, providing a look at the everyday life of Roanoke Island in the mid 1800s. OBC hopes to employ interpreters, establish a garden and bring live farm animals to the site. OBC estimates the site will be open by the summer of 2005. The Etheridge Farmstead is about 2 miles from the Manteo waterfront on Highway 64.



Photos (from left to right, top to bottom): the Etheridge house; an interior room with a loom and fireplace; a reproduction kitchen (foreground); the farm's dairy storage, outhouse and smokehouse; building the chimney for the slave cabin.

Photos courtesy of Melody Leckie and Bill Parker

