
A LIGHTKEEPER'S DAY: OLD BALDY LIGHTHOUSE IN THE YEAR 1837

MALS FINAL PROJECT /GLS 598

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PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The final project of my MALS experience will be the creation of a book for 4th grade readers about the life of a lighthouse keeper on Bald Head Island in the 1830's. It will begin with a fictionalized account of one of his days tending the light and doing his chores, and it will be supplemented by factual information and illustrations about North Carolina's oldest lighthouse, Old Baldy, built in 1817. The objective will be to educate these students about the hardship and rigors these men experienced doing the dutiful job of keeping a light burning for many ships, ships which plied the Cape Fear River in a necessary flow of trade for the region. The book will also provide facts for the students who are studying lighthouses as a section of the required 4th grade curriculum about North Carolina history. Each year, the Old Baldy Foundation is contacted by teachers and students alike searching for information about this lighthouse. This book could be sent and used in the classroom or distributed to the classes who are able to visit the lighthouse. It could also be sold in the Smith Island Museum gift shop in their book corner.

BACKGROUND

My interest in this topic began 20 years ago when I worked in the planning department for Bald Head Island Limited, the land development interest on the Island—in fact, I *was*

the planning department (today with a staff of 12), the lone landscape architect with my sidekick, the construction superintendent (Harold was in his 60's, a balding, sprightly man whose answer for everything was a mischievous grin, twinkle in his eye and a wry comment that never seemed to answer the question; as he walked away, I myself, a 20-something planning novice equipped with a fearsome load of college knowledge, would realize I had been stymied again). Together we dreamed of the day Bald Head Island would be more than a jumble of grey 1970's oversized shacks, the marina would be fully dredged, and we could ride to the Island on a real ferry rather than a churning, damp landing craft with a tacked-on prow. We lamented the state of our landmark, the Old Baldy Lighthouse, which sported pseudo-historic windows (me talking), no door, and a steel frame of a cupola into which the coastal rains were allowed to pour. The inside was a murky, dusty, mildewed mess. People loved the lighthouse, but nobody was doing anything about it. Enter *nobody*--myself, donning the cape of preservationist (in complete ignorant bliss of the enormity of the project)! Together with a few other employees of the company (not Harold--he knew a hot potato when he saw one), we formed the Old Baldy Foundation, with the mission to preserve the lighthouse and educate about her history. These fellow preservation comrades now have moved on (and sadly, we lost Harold to cancer), but I still bear the standard these many years later—and through three children and a marriage, I somehow still cling to my personal duty of perpetuating the Foundation mission and storing the non-profit corporate wisdom... These days, we have a preserved lighthouse, a museum which replicates the lighthouse keepers cottage (circa 1850), a salaried executive director, a working board of directors, 20,000 plus visitors a year, and a gift shop which nets more per square feet than

any Tiffany's. Our mission of education is implemented through Historical Tours, "Lighthouse Learners" (school outreach and visits), speakers and workshops, a website (www.oldbaldy.org), and special days which feature Civil War reenactments, lectures and hands-on learning stations. Our mission has been expanded to include education about the man-made history of Smith Island as a whole. One of our largest needs has been to fill the gap for these 4th graders with written material for their study.

MALS CORRELATION

My years with the MALS program has seen me attack a wide range of subjects—film, textiles, environment, the politics of the 1960's, food, American culture, coastal hazards—but it was the historical aspect of some of these subjects to which I was naturally attracted. I have particular fondness for my research into, for instance, the history of textiles in the Cape Fear area; George Wallace's claim to fame in my paper, "The Stand in the Schoolhouse Door, a One Act Play;" the Galveston Hurricane of 1900; the economic and environmental implications of shrimp farming; and the history of yard art and why our culture's partiality for the pink flamingo...and other topics of fascinating inquiry which have filled my nine semesters of study in MALS. Combining this affection for history with my Old Baldy Foundation role in producing a useable publication for my MALS final project seems like a logical choice.

METHODOLOGY/RESOURCES

My long apprenticeship in lighthouse preservation has introduced me to many sources of information about lighthouses and their keepers. Historical documents, books and archives will be consulted, a 4th grade teacher will be a reader, and the most important experts in the field, real live 4th graders, will be asked to read and comment. I will

approach the project in three parts, which will most likely follow the order of the book—fiction, facts, then the illustrations (though these and historic photographs will be used throughout the book, an important part of the book will be the measured drawings of the Old Baldy lighthouse in the appendix). Finally, a graphic artist will be helping me with layout and printing; this may or may not be completed for my presentation but will definitely be in the works.

Potential Resources:

Bald Head by David Stick

Cap'n Charlie and Lights of the Lower Cape Fear by Ethel Herring

Cemeteries of Southport by Dorcas W. Schmidt

Southport (Smithville), A Chronology by Bill Reaves

Tales and Traditions of the Lower Cape Fear by James Sprunt

“Old Baldy Sold Down the River,” Southern Architect, (September 1963).

Smith Island and the Cape Fear Peninsula by Arthur W. Cooper and

Sheafe Satterthwaite

History of Ft Johnston by Wilson Angley

Lighthouse Families by Cheryl Roberts

US Census

Microfilms of keeper appointments 1852-1912 (M1373, National Archives)

DEADLINES

Dec 17-Jan 26 Research and writing

Jan 27 Submit first draft to committee

Feb 6-16 Revisions

Feb 17	Submit second draft of project to committee
Feb 27-Mar 16	Revisions
March 17	Submission of final draft to project director
March 27-31	Meet with director/work on corrections
April 7	Submit final project
April 10-28	Presentation to be scheduled