

Lighthouse DIGEST



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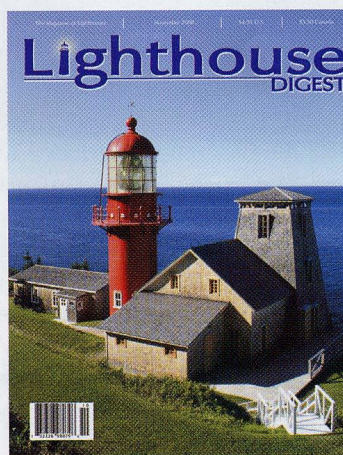
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Little-Houses At The Light-Houses



This month's cover photo is of Canada's Pointe-à-la-Renommée Lighthouse, which was first lit in 1907 replacing an earlier lighthouse that was built in 1880. Photograph and text by Joanne Therrien.

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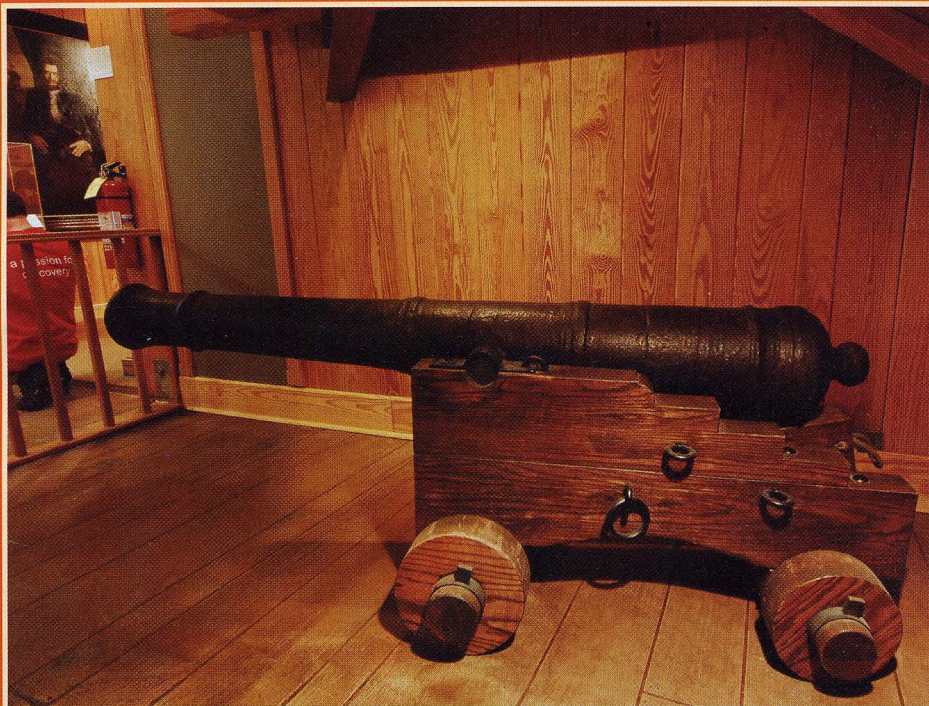
Pirates, Shipwrecks And Lighthouses

**By Michael Salvatorezza &
Christopher P. Weaver**

The North Carolina coast is a peculiar piece of coastline. Curving eastward into the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and fringed by a thin stretch of sandy barrier islands called the Outer Banks, this stretch of real estate is as well known for its treacherous waters and vulnerability to violent storms as it is for its lovely beaches and idyllic vacation spots. Because of the shape of this coastline and the dangerous shoals that form here, the "Graveyard of the Atlantic", as this section of the ocean has been come to be called, has claimed many a ship over the years. Everything from Civil War era ironclad vessels to World War II era German U-boats to ships laden with gold from the California Gold Rush to modern day fishing have all met their demise in these turbulent waters. Even legendary pirates have made their base of operations as well as lost numerous ships in the ever-changing sands and dangerous waters off North Carolina.



The Cape lookout Light sports a unique checkerboard pattern.



One of the canons recovered from the presumed wreck of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* is on display at the North Carolina Maritime Museum.

To help guide mariners safely along this perilous coastline, a series of prominent lighthouses have been erected over the years, including the famous Cape Hatteras lighthouse, the Currituck Beach lighthouse, the Bodie Island Lighthouse and the Oak Island Lighthouse. The lighthouses of the Outer Banks are all stationed approximately 40 miles apart so that any ship traveling along this coast would remain in contact with a lighthouse at all times. One of the most beautiful of these lighthouses is the Cape Lookout Light.

Cape Lookout is a small island at the southern end of the Outer Banks. Congress first authorized a light station for Cape Lookout in 1804. The first lighthouse built here was completed in 1812 and was immediately beset with problems, not the least of which was that the light was too weak to provide sufficient assistance to ships navigating these waters.

In 1857, a second lighthouse was approved for Cape Lookout and was built two years later in 1859 at a cost of \$45,000. The tower stands 163 feet tall and was equipped with a 1st-order Fresnel lens that could throw its light

some 19 miles. The design of this lighthouse was superior to many others of its day and became the model for the other light towers built along the Outer Banks. The lighthouse had only one weakness in its construction, its spiral staircase. Since the staircase was not anchored into the surrounding walls of the tower, the staircase was plagued with numerous repairs. Visitors to this majestic tower cannot climb the stairs even to this day for this reason.

In addition to specialized light patterns and lens designs, unique patterns were painted on the outside of each light tower to help distinguish themselves from one another. In 1873, the Lighthouse Board decided that the Bodie Island Light would have an alternating black and white banding pattern, the Cape Hatteras Light would have its famous spiraling black and white bands and the Cape Lookout Light would have a Black and White checkered pattern. The Currituck Light would remain unpainted to show off its distinguishing red brick exterior.

However, after the Cape Lookout tower was painted, its design took on a diamond shape appearance instead of

a checkered pattern. But this design had a greater significance than simple identification: The black diamonds are oriented in a north-south direction and the white diamonds point to an east-west direction. The black diamonds face towards shallower waters and Back Sound and the white diamonds face Onslow Bay and Raleigh's Bay where the waters are deeper. When bad conditions arose, mariners could use these distinctive diamond shape patterns to find safer anchorages.

In 1933, the light at Cape Lookout was electrified and was automated in 1950. In 1972, the original 1st-order lens was removed and replaced with a modern DCB-24 lens. The light from this upgraded design was now able to reach 20 miles and would flash every 15 seconds. After being displayed at a Virginia Coast Guard Station, the original lens was installed in the Block Island Southeast Light off New York's Long Island in 1994.

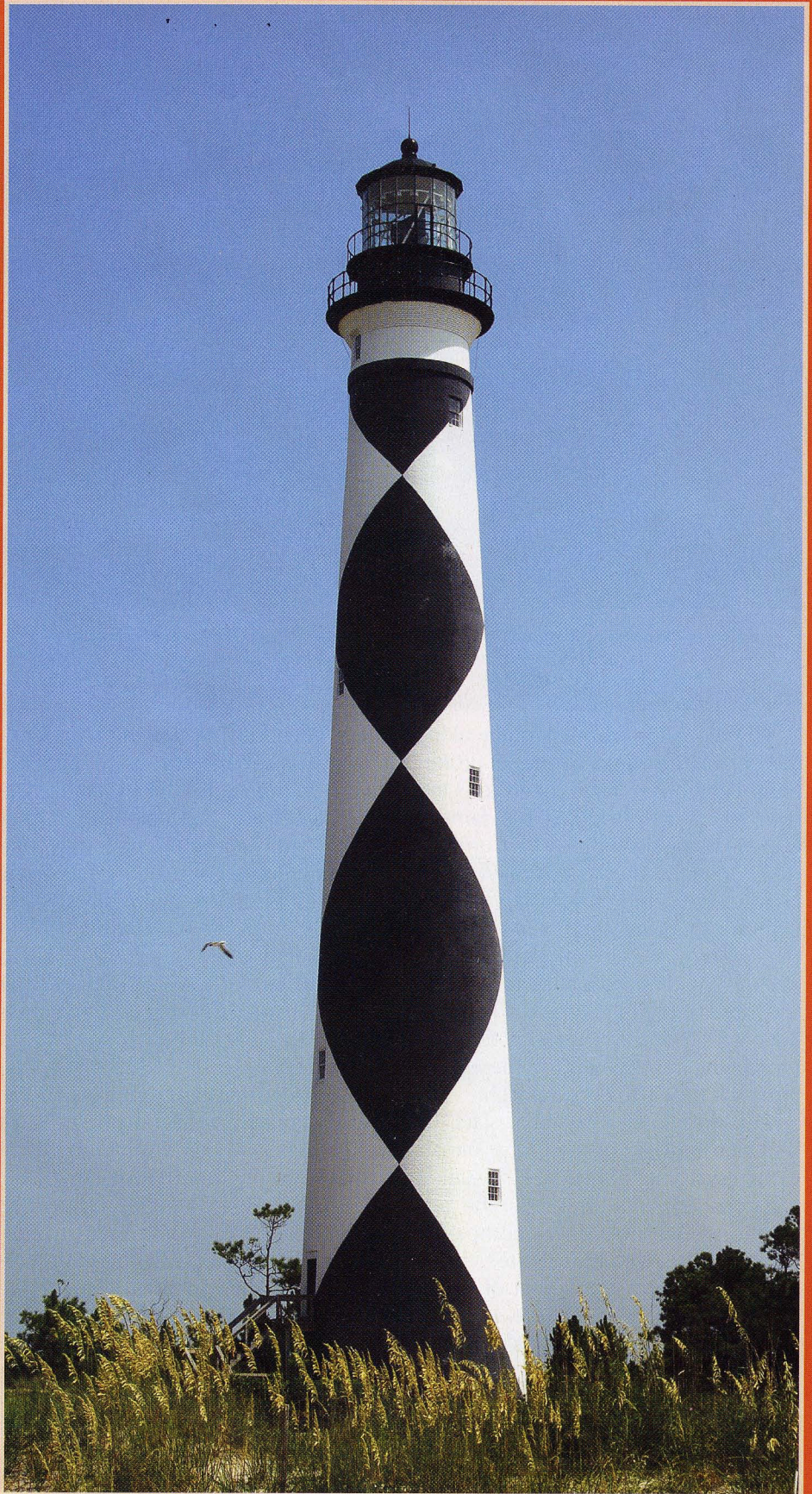
Today, the lighthouse is part of the Cape Lookout National Seashore, which officially opened on the nation's bicentennial on July 4, 1976. The National Seashore at Cape Lookout consists of a 56-mile stretch of islands that run from Ocracoke inlet to the north down to Beaufort Inlet to the south. The National Seashore is only accessible by boat and is a wonderful expanse of pristine barrier island environment that captivate and enthrall thousands of visitors annually.

Submerged in the waters all along the Cape Lookout National Seashore is a treasure trove of maritime history. One such artifact of this nautical heritage is the presumed wreck of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, the flagship of Blackbeard's pirate fleet of outlaw vessels. Historical records show that in November of 1717, English pirates captured the French slave-ship *La Concorde* near the island of - the pirates then converted *La Concorde* into their flagship and renamed the vessel *Queen Anne's Revenge*. After spending the winter attacking vessels in the Caribbean the pirate fleet consisting of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* and three smaller sloops, blockaded the port of

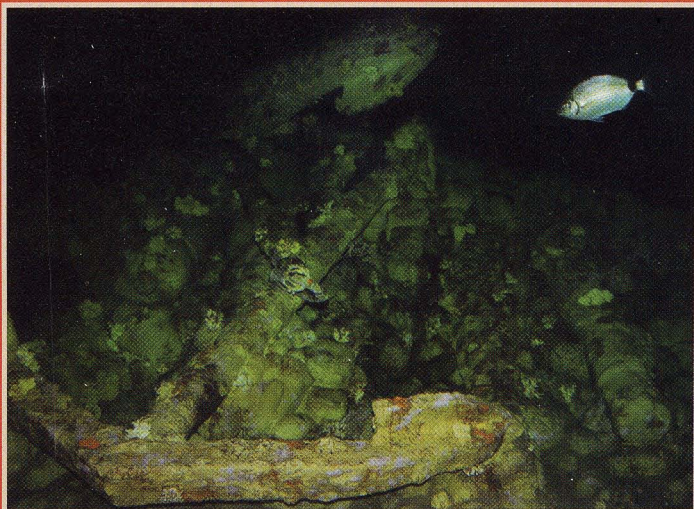
Charleston in May of 1718. Afterwards, Blackbeard continued up the coast, and he lost his flagship while attempting to enter Beaufort Inlet, North Carolina. Five months later he was killed in a bloody battle at Ocracoke.

The *Queen Anne's Revenge* ran aground on a sandbar just a short distance from Beaufort Inlet, and disappeared into the shifting sands. For nearly three centuries, searchers looked for this elusive shipwreck. It wasn't until November 22, 1996 that a private salvage firm (Intersal) stumbled upon the wreck while searching for a long lost sunken Spanish Fleet. The wreck, mostly covered in sand, was only identifiable by an anchor fluke protruding above the seabed. After subsequent excavations revealed large numbers of cannons, anchors and other artifacts, the identity of the wreck began to take shape. Today, although there has yet to be a single, definitive piece of evidence that unequivocally identifies the wreck as that of the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, hundreds of thousands of pieces of evidence and pain-staking research say that it is. Nothing has been found to be contradictory to this theory and the wreck is now generally presumed to be the long lost wreckage of the most famous pirate ship of all time.

The wreckage, sitting in only 24 feet of murky water only a short distance from shore near Beaufort Inlet, is still being meticulously recovered and restored by teams of highly trained divers, archaeologists and scientists working for the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, the Maritime Research Institute and licensed by the State of North Carolina. The wreck site (designated OSA site #31CR3) is declared a historical site and is off limits to anyone without proper permits. Fortunately, the North Carolina Archaeology Branch in partnership with Carteret County Dive Operators offer a Dive Down Program that runs several times a year to educate the public on this genuinely historic shipwreck and to provide SCUBA diving access to small groups of recreational divers. This is



The Cape Lookout Light.



A replica of the wreck site is on display at the North Carolina Maritime Museum, affording the general public a glimpse into this rare shipwreck.

only one of two known pirate shipwrecks ever discovered (the other being the wreck of the *Wydah* off the coast of Cape Cod).

Blackbeard the Pirate was a very colorful historical figure. Little is known of this man, including his real name and much of his background. His fearsome reputation, however, has persisted to this day and in many ways he was truly the iconic pirate. The fact that his long lost flagship has likely now been discovered gives everyone a chance to learn more about pirate life in the 1700s and to connect with this period of American history.

Standing on the shores of Cape Lookout, peering out over the restless ocean and walking along the shifting sands of this treacherous coast gives everyone a sense of wonder...what other long lost mysteries lie beneath these sands and waves? What tragedies has this lighthouse at Cape Lookout witnessed? How many disasters at sea has this lighthouse prevented in the past and how many will it prevent in the future? The sentinels of our shores, our beloved lighthouses, wink knowingly with each blink of their light... 🗼

For more information about the QAR Project and the Dive Down Program see:

<http://www.qaronline.org/>

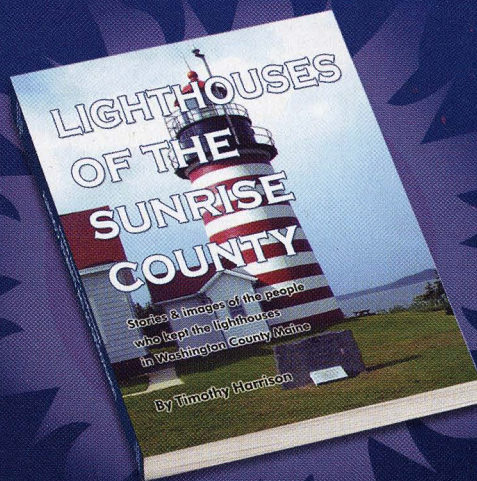
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By Timothy Harrison



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