

CAROLINA

S T Y L E

"CELEBRATING THE COASTAL GOOD LIFE"

**OUTER BANKS
ARCHITECTURE:
The "Unpainted Aristocracy"**

**LOGGERHEAD TURTLES
Gentle Creatures
of the Night**

**A TASTE OF NAGS HEAD
Five Historic
Restaurants**

**THE SEARCH FOR
BLACKBEARD
at Ocracoke
and Bath**

**SUNKEN
TREASURE
A Dive on the
USS Monitor**





SMALL TOWN LIVING...NATURALLY O R I E N T A L

BY MARGARET MARCHUK

Oriental. I fear writing about it. I know others will go in search of what I have discovered. Then they will pack their bags and move here tomorrow.

I want Oriental to remain as I have found it. There is a soothing-to-the-soul rhythm of life here. A river village, its people and livelihood are immersed in the culture of water that embraces this land. Fishing and sailing are integral elements of the townscape.

Even when Oriental gets busy during summer months, it's not that kind of "I have so much to accomplish and when will I ever get it done" busy.

It's Oriental busy with people on sailboats coming, going, anchored and doing what sailing people do best. Relaxing. Swapping stories of places they have been and towns they want to see. Evening drinks on deck, toasting the sun's dramatic departure.

In Oriental, no one particularly cares if you cross all the "t"s and dot all the "i"s. It's unrehearsed even when it's planned. There's

room to change things even when it's all set. It's all very easy going.

I'm inclined to believe this all has to do with the fact that people who are drawn here to visit or live here have salt water in their veins and sail-speak tongues. No one just finds themselves in Oriental. It is premeditated. By boat, one charts the course up the Neuse River along the coast of North Carolina. By car, it is a 24-mile drive east of New Bern, North Carolina, well off the beaten track.

I read a travel article that touted Oriental as the sailing capital of the East Coast. I asked if this were true. Brenda Harris, former owner of the Oriental Marina, warned me that Annapolis might take issue if I repeated that in print. "One can certainly say Oriental is North Carolina's sailing capital," she affirms. Though they might agree with that superlative statement, Oriental folks feel quite content whatever their status.

No need to feel competitive here. There's one doctor, one dentist, one police officer,

one part-time lawyer, one beauty shop, one gas station, one pizza parlor, one Rotary Club and one health club. There is really no need for more. Streets might get cluttered. There are no need for stoplights. There are some stop signs, and that's because the new people in town did not know which streets were paved first and had the right of way, according to Hugh Harris, a local surveyor. In Oriental, the roadways are made for people in sneakers or deck shoes who walk, bike and just plain meander.

The Neuse River at Oriental's doorstep seems to have been created for sailing. You can have the sails up and drawing within minutes after the urge to fly with the wind. If its seclusion your heart's after, anchor in any of the nearby creeks or coves. There you can meditate on the color of the blue heron or be entertained by the Kingfisher diving for his supper.

This area is a safe haven for sailors. Two miles up the Neuse River, on the southwest

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

side of the Pamlico Sound, Oriental is protected from the ocean by the Outer Banks. These same waters offered protection years ago to that scoundrel Pirate Blackbeard, who is said to have had his hideout around Green and Smith Creeks.

Tucked away on the creeks are Oriental's big marinas and service facilities. There are people who make it their business to fix up your boat or boat owners can do-it-themselves. The yards allow boat owners to do their own thing.

There are more sail craft than residents in Oriental. With all these boats, it seems only fitting that the town was named after a sailing vessel. The way the story goes is that in 1870 Uncle Lou Midyette was sailing from his home on the Outer Banks to New Bern when a squall kicked up. He found safe harbor and anchored near this land that embraces six creeks that flow into the Neuse River. He liked what he saw and got the feeling this would be a good place to live. So he returned home to Bodie Island, packed up his family and came to settle.

When it came time to apply for a Post Office in 1896, the village needed to change its name from Smith Creek, since there was another town in North Carolina with that name. Fourteen years prior, Aunt Becky Midyette had found a name plate from a ship called *Oriental* that was wrecked off Hatteras. The name was put to a vote, the town took the name, and the post office opened.

The town bustled for a time in the early 1900s when the John L. Roper Lumber Mill came to town. Business boomed and so did the population.

With all this activity, a railroad was built in 1911 to connect Oriental to New Bern. Before the train, people arrived usually by steamer, which plied the waters daily from Norfolk, Virginia to New Bern.

It all ended when the Roper mill burned down in 1914 and did not reopen. The railroad ceased operation. You can still

identify the depot on Water Street, although it has been turned into a residence. With few jobs available people left town and the population dropped.

Oriental residents number 801 today. As for job opportunities, this is not the place you would relocate to in order to make a so called "career move." Don't expect to find that six-figure, white collar position here. More likely, you would want to move here and then you'd ask yourself, "But what can I do to make a living?"

Residents here don't seem to worry much about that. Most folks are retired, semi-retired or have opted for early retirement. Retirement here means doing what



The home of Dr. Robert Hyde, a retired orthopedic surgeon from Texas, is a replica of a screw-pile lighthouse that stood at Hooper's Strait in the Chesapeake Bay off Maryland. A circular staircase leads to each floor and the 42-foot-high tower, complete with a flashing light. Photo by Watts Carr

you love doing. Whether it's art work, gardening, fishing or just plain puttering around and being neighborly. And, of course, there is always sailing.

Dr. Robert Hyde, a retired orthopedic surgeon from Texas, usually can be found puttering in his machine shop beneath his conversation-piece lighthouse home. His residence is a replica of the screw-pile lighthouse that was in Chesapeake Bay at Hooper's Strait. The Hooper lighthouse was later acquired by the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum and moved to St. Michael, Maryland.

"We've got the plans from the Coast Guard and our architect just added some extra footage so we had more living space," explains Dr. Hyde.

The house was built in 1983. A circular

staircase leads to each floor and all the way up to the 42-foot-high tower. "The beacon has been operating since 1984. I obtained a government permit to do that," he says.

Dr. Hyde rigged up the light to flash an "O" every 55 seconds. He managed to do this by recycling parts he acquired and his own tinkering. As Brenda Harris from the marina tells it, she knew how Dr. Hyde would recycle parts, so she offered him a used dishwasher. Little did she realize the timer from the machine went into the beacon's light system.

Several residents say Dr. Hyde's motto is "parts is parts." He chuckles. "Making parts fit together and work was something

I did as a physician for 40 years. Now I do it for a hobby." Many a sailor who has needed help with a part when working on their boat has been directed to this parts doctor.

Like most people who have settled here, the Hydys sailed into port one day in 1976 and fell under Oriental's spell.

Many of the homes in Oriental have backyard dockage on creeks where residents keep their boats ready for sailing. Some even purchase lots with dockage to keep their boats and eventually build a home. It is not unusual to see a car on an

undeveloped lot with a sailboat moored out back.

"If there is one way one must see Oriental, it has to be by boat," says Tom Davis, owner of the 44-foot sailing yacht *Banjo*.

Tom graciously volunteered his boat and tour-guide service. A man of the water, nothing could make Tom happier than to be cruising around exploring the waterways surrounding Oriental in his pontoon boat.

Tom Davis is certainly correct. The only way to appreciate what all the sailors in this area rave about is to experience Oriental from the water. Cruising past the town harbor, the fishing heritage is evident from the trawlers and crab houses. The Oriental Yacht Club, on Raccoon Creek, was once a crab house. It was converted by the first




Sail/Loft
REALTY, INC.

Oriental's Oldest & Most Experienced Real Estate Firm

 HOMES

 VILLAS

 HOMESITES

 ACREAGE

 BOATSLIPS

Representing Wooded Waterfront and Waterview Homes and Lots, at Affordable Prices Near the Picturesque Fishing Village of Oriental

Sail/Loft Realty, Inc.
Broad Street, P.O. Box 130
Oriental, NC 28571
(800) 327-4189
(919) 249-1787



Call or Write for Free Information Packet



RESTAURANT AND MOTEL

We Serve *ONLY* Fresh Seafood

- Daily Lunch and Dinner Specials
- Rooms Available for Functions

Open 7 days a week
Lunch 11-5 • Dinner 5-10

Located on Hodges Street on the Harbor, Oriental

249-1818 Motel Reservations

249-0190 Motel Guests

249-2204 Restaurant

- Visit the Topsail Lounge, upstairs •

cruising sailors to sail out of Oriental. The Oriental Marina, Motel and Restaurant is here, too. This place has long been the unofficial home of the Neuse Sailing Association, which runs a number of racing and social events from its lawn.

Locals like Tom will tell you there is no normal moon tide on the Neuse. The water level rises or falls according to wind direction, strength and duration. A stiff southwesterly can make all the anchorages in Oriental very shallow.

There are two sailing schools in the village as well as bareboat charters for qualified sailors.

The town's location makes it a great jumping off point for sailors. The Neuse River is five miles wide here and a sailor can cruise to the Pamlico Sound which is as large as Long Island Sound or the lower Chesapeake Bay. And Pamlico Sound's connection to the Currituck, Croatan and Albemarle Sounds makes for the most expansive sailing and fishing waters on the East Coast. Truly a sailor's Nirvana.

The Inns

Even if you don't sail, you can still experience the good life in Oriental. There are two bed and breakfasts in town. **The Tar Heel Inn** and **The Cartwright House**. Both will pamper you in turn of the century Victorian homes. The Cartwright House offers a Cruise 'N Snooze Weekend, which includes a champagne reception, gourmet breakfasts and a half-day of cruising.

Patricia Davis, a former Greensboro restaurateur and owner of the Cartwright House, says she was in search of a place to set up her easel and start the second half of her life as an artist. What she found was a

1903 Victorian house a block from the Neuse River at a more than reasonable price. The bed and breakfast idea evolved as she renovated the building. Lately, it seems the art Patricia has been dedicating herself to is perfecting the fine details of gracious southern hospitality.

There are also two motels in town. The **Oriental Marina Motel** fronts the harbor where much of the activity takes place particularly in the summer months. From here, you can watch the comings and goings of sail craft and fishing boats. On South Neuse Drive, across the street from

a small park area, the **River Neuse Motel** offers a wonderful view of the river. Check into one of these establishments and then check out the 30-block town by foot or bicycle.

Stores

Stop by Ernest Johnson's **Studio** across from the Oriental Marina. His paintings tell the story of his love affair with the

water. He's relatively new in town, though his gentle demeanor fits in nicely with the quiet beauty of the area.

Saunter across to the **Inland Waterway Treasure Company**, which caters to the needs of modern boaters along with a variety of gifts, clothes and jewelry.

For treasure hunters there is Lucille and Billy Truitt's **Ol' Store**. There is plenty to rummage through from old toys, magazines, used appliances, clothes, to jars of local honey. The store overflows with goods that spill out onto the front porch, where dozens of chairs of all kinds are nestled among the merchandise. It's not unusual during the warmer weather for a banjo pickin' jam session by the local talent to start up around sunset on the porch.

I read a travel article that touted Oriental as the sailing capital on the East Coast. I asked if this were true. Brenda Harris, former owner of the Oriental Marina, warned me that Annapolis might take issue if I repeated that in print. "One can certainly say Oriental is North Carolina's sailing capital," she affirms. Though they might agree with that superlative statement, Oriental folks feel quite content whatever their status.

(Continued from previous page)

Once a grocery store run by Lucille's father, the Ol' Store still feeds people with the spirit of community, where sitting and conversation is primary business.

Restaurants

Walking, biking and chatting can work up an appetite. There are six restaurants in Oriental to satisfy your taste buds. **The Village Restaurant** and the **Oriental Marina Restaurant** serve up hearty fare of seafood and steaks. You won't find a McDonald's nearby, but you can still get a hamburger for a quarter from **Red Lee's Grill**. **The Trawl Door**, a converted hardware store, serves seafood so good that it earned owners, Jim and Lois Moye, six consecutive Silver Spoon Awards.

A craving for a pizza to go with that cold beer is how **Scot's Pizza** came to be. Owners Scooter and Jean Lewis came to visit some friends in Oriental. On their way home, they were caught in a traffic jam only miles away from their home. They looked at each other and agreed. Two weeks later they packed up their family and moved to Oriental. Scooter gave up his surveying business when they moved. What to do? As Scooter tells it. "One night while we were having a beer my wife said she could go for a pizza.

Only one problem. There was no place in Oriental to go for pizza." The rest is history.

That's how some things occur around here. People sitting around having friendly conversation and the next thing you know something happens.

Circle 10 Gallery. "Nine years ago, four artists who just wanted a place to display and to be associated with other artists to keep them inspired, came up with the idea of an artists' cooperative," explains Dixie Bridge, a Circle Ten exhibiting member. "They felt at the time that ten artists would be enough, hence the name."

Celebrations. Interesting events can come from a name, too. The town of Oriental has its own Chinese dragon, which welcomes in the New Year. The dragon walk has been a tradition in town for over 25 years. "A dragon marching at midnight on New Year's Eve is an Oriental custom to bring good luck," according to Joe Cox, a

celebrate in any season for any reason. And why not? In Oriental, there are a lot of good things to proclaim.

Larry Gwaltney says Oriental sells itself. He should know. As owner of Sail/Loft Realty, he sees himself more of a tour guide than a salesman when it comes to showing property. He credits his

father, Joe, with starting the first real estate firm in the village eighteen years ago. He says Joe coined the phrase "Sailing Capital of North Carolina" to describe Oriental. Today, there are six other real estate companies showing the best of what Oriental has to offer.

Another, Mariner Realty, is owned by Allen Propst. He confesses that even though Oriental is known as the "Village of Leisure Living" there is little time to relax when it comes to community involvement. President-Elect of the Oriental Rotary Club, Mr. Propst says, "We have reached the 75% mark in our fund-raising efforts to restore the 'Old Theatre' into the Pamlico County Civic and Cultural Center. This old movie theatre will be the new home to the Pelican Players theater group as well as the center for other cultural, civic and educational activities in the area.

"Our Rotary Club is actively working on the 2nd Annual Oriental Rotary Tarpon Tournament which is July 29th through the 31st. Last year's all-release tournament helped us to give \$5,000 in scholarships to Pamlico County seniors and we expect this year's event to raise more than \$10,000!"

What Oriental has to offer is a community that lies somewhere between the fictional "It's A Wonderful Life" and "Northern Exposure." There is a simplicity here that allures.

To know what I mean you just have to experience Oriental. Naturally. **CSM**



(Top) Oriental Harbor on Raccoon Creek from a sailor's view. Photo by Margaret Marchuk
(Bottom) The Tar Heel Inn, one of the two Bed and Breakfasts in Oriental. Photo by Watts Carr

retired art professor, who is credited with building the first fiery creature. It takes 20 to 30 people underneath the dragon's body to make it come to life and parade around the streets.

The streets of the town also come alive during the Spirit of Christmas Celebration. There is a parade that winds through the candle-lit streets and open houses at local businesses, where home cooking, baked goodies and good cheer are served. Local musicians perform at the various establishments.

Residents of Oriental seem to love to