

Chapter Two:

Weather Forecasting on the Outer Banks



Hurricane Isabel, North Carolina, 2003, Photo: NOAA Library

The Outer Banks are a narrow chain of barrier islands stretching more than 175 miles along North Carolina's coast. Separated from the mainland by sounds up to 30 miles wide, the area is subject to severe storms and high winds. The Outer Banks of North Carolina was an important part of the national weather network.

The U.S. Weather Bureau established several weather stations and observation posts throughout North Carolina and its coast as part of a national network of weather stations. The first coastal observation station in North Carolina was in Wilmington, established in 1871. A station at Cape Hatteras followed in 1874.

Smaller Weather Bureau observation stations on the North Carolina coast were set up over the years at Wash Woods on the Currituck Outer Banks (1878); Kitty Hawk (1875), which was moved to Manteo (1904); Portsmouth Village (1876); Cape Lookout (1876) Beaufort Inlet (1878); and other communities, although some of them were temporary.⁸

⁸ Stick David, *Outer Banks of North Carolina*, Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1958

The first US Weather Bureau Station managed by the Army Signal Service's on Hatteras Island was established at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Keeper's Quarter in 1874; was moved to the Hatteras Life Saving Station in December 1, 1880 and later transferred to a Hatteras Village private residence on October 1, 1883, known as Styron's Building. A few years later the Weather Bureau built a structure for the station in Hatteras village for the sum of \$250.⁹



Weather Bureau Station, Hatteras, N.C. ca 1900, photo: NC State Archives

This building was a small one-story framed structure consisting of three rooms, two of the small rooms, each about 9 by 6 feet and one larger one about 14 feet square. There was also a small attic that was used for storage.

Cape Hatteras was an important location for weather forecasting where the Gulf Stream and Labrador Current meet. Cape Hatteras is a major shipping route, and shipwrecks were common along Cape Hatteras. The Weather Bureau felt that there was a need to have a main station on The North Carolina coast was important enough for the Weather Bureau to build a station in Hatteras Village.

Residents that lived on the Outer Banks received their news by boat, or through word of mouth. Residents of isolated Portsmouth and Ocracoke Islands got word of an approaching storm in sealed tubes dropped from airplanes.

⁹ Stick David, *Outer Banks of North Carolina*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1958