

## Chapter Four: The Station Keepers



Hatteras Weather Bureau, ca.1902 Photo: Mason & Vera Meekins

S.L. Doshier, Observer, (pictured sitting on the porch bench)

Doshier wife Cara, standing next to the horse, with Hugh adopted child on the horse.

The Hatteras Weather Bureau Stations was manned by an observer who lived in the station with his family and a maintenance man who lived in the community; it was equipped with telegraph communication to the District Forecast Center in Washington, D.C. The observers at the Weather Bureau stations collected weather data hourly, including temperature, pressure, wind direction, wind speed, visibility, and humidity; later they also collected information by lofting helium balloons. The information was telegraphed to Weather Bureau Headquarters in Washington DC. where it was mapped and broadcast widely via telegraph. The early weather predictions were called “probabilities” and were only for 24 hours in advance. Later the preferred term was “indications.” The term “forecast” was first used in 1889, when predictions could be made 48 hours in advance.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Brimley Collection, Box 7, Cape Hatteras, F-10, Weather Station, Hatteras, ca. 1900" NC State Archives.

The Weather Station was responsible for the issuance of Coastal Forecasts and warnings for the area as well as the dissemination of storm warnings for Dare and Hyde counties. The station did not signal to passing vessels because the nearby Durrants Life Saving Station was equipped for that work. Information gathered by the Life Saving Station was sent to the Weather Station and in turn was telegraphed to Norfolk, Virginia.

Warnings were communicated by using weather flags on a pole outside the station. The storm warning tower forecasts provided a useful service to local residents, especially mariners and fishermen.



The U.S. Weather Bureau once used Coastal Warning Display signal flags to warn mariners of wind shifts or approaching storms <sup>12</sup>

The Hatteras Weather Station was tolerated within the community, but not fully accepted. an inspector of the Bureau had to said in 1914. This station is, of course, of greatest importance in connection with the forecast work of the Bureau, but locally it appears to be of no consequence except as a means of communication with the outside world. The people are very peculiar, and have a code of ethics all their own, the principal element of which is a firm belief in their right to criticize the Weather Bureau and all connected with it, and to resent any criticism in return.

The present official is very capable and a gentlemanly man, and has done everything in his power to preserve peaceful relations. However, many refuse to be pacified, although, of course, others are friendly with Mr. Wilson and his family. Any other Weather Bureau man will have the same experience. The only use Hatteras has for the Weather Bureau is the money that it brings here.

<sup>12</sup> Town of Manteo, NC

The residents of Hatteras used the Weather Bureau Station for the telegraph and advance warnings about major storms. The Weather Bureau set up a system of a storm-warning flag tower. The flags represented different weather conditions. Starting around 1898, the Weather Bureau supplied its stations with towers on which to post warnings, using flags during the day and lights at night.

The life of a Observers for the Weather Station was routine is attested in a letter requesting transfer by Weather Observer S.L. Doshier in 1911, “The lonely life one is forced to lead... here and the ...continuous round of duty one must perform in keeping up the work alone, where there are none of the diverting pleasures of civilization to break the dull, soporific monotony of the situation, prove after a time to be a strain that depresses even the most optimistic nature, and a physical and an intellectual menace that even the most robust constitution and the strongest mentality can not long withstand”.<sup>13</sup>

### **Hatteras, North Carolina, Weather Bureau Station Keepers**

- Albert J. Davis, Observer, Weather Bureau, Hatteras, NC.
- Weather Bureau, Hatteras, NC. July 16, 1903 to May 14, 1911.S.L. Doshier, Assistant Observer, Weather Bureau, Hatteras, NC. July 16, 1903 to May 14, 1911.
- Joseph J. Doshier, Chief, Weather Bureau, Hatteras, NC. from April 15, 1911 to May 14, 1914.
- C.E. Wilson, 1912-1914 Weather Observer
- W.L. Wyland, 1915-1917 Weather Observer
- Mark S. Howard, 1918 Weather Observer
- F.H. Ahearn 1919 Weather Observer
- Lucy Stowe, Junior Meteorologist, worked and lived in the station from 1943-1957
- Richard Dailey, Junior Meteorologist, worked and lived in the station from 1946-1952

### **Manteo, North Carolina, Weather Bureau Station Keepers**

- Alfred H. Thiessen, Local Forecast Official, January 18, 1901- January 22, 1903
- Alfred C. Pickels, December 26, 1901 – February 3, 1903
- William T. Lathrop, February 11, 1902 – April 6, 1902
- Louis Dorman, Observer, March 11, 1902 – December 23, 1902
- Ovide St. Marie, February 13, 1902- November 14, 1902
- Alpheus W. Drinkwater, November 10, 1904 -<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hatteras Weather Bureau Station National Register of Historic Places, February 17, 1978

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Weather Bureau Personnel Records, National Park Service, Manteo, NC



Hatteras Weather Bureau, ca.1943. Photo: Lucy Stowe

In September of 1938, Lucy Stowe, who was born in Hatteras Village in 1925, remembers that the locals in her day heeded the Weather Bureau's warnings.

"Absolutely, they used them," says Stowe. "You could see the top of the tower from all over the village, and the fishermen definitely paid attention to them." Lucy was employed in 1943 as a Junior Weather Observer lived in the station until 1957.<sup>15</sup>

U.S Weather Bureau hired Weather Observer most all were men, but during World War II mostly women were working at the 60 Weather Bureau Station throughout the United States as observers and forecasters.

Following is a first hand account of the storm, as related by Mr. S.L. Doshier, official Observer with the Weather Bureau on Hatteras Island.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Lucy Stowe, NPS/Southern Oral History Project, Amy Glass, July 15, 1988

## Hatteras Devastated by Hurricane

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Weather Bureau  
Office of the Observer

Subject: Hurricane  
Station: Hatteras, North Carolina  
Date: August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1899

Chief of the Weather Bureau,  
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

I have the honor to make the following report of the severe hurricane which swept over this section on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> instantly.

The wind began blowing a gale from the east on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, varying in velocity from 35 to 50 miles an hour....During the early morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> the wind increased to a hurricane and at about 4 a.m. it was blowing at the rate of 70 miles, at 10 a.m. it had increased to 84 miles and at 1 p.m. it was blowing a velocity of 93 miles with occasional extreme velocities of 120 miles to 140 per hour. The record of wind from about 1 p.m. was lost, but it is estimated that the wind blew even with greater force from about 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. and it is believed that between these hours the wind reached a regular velocity of at least 100 miles per hour....

At about 7:30 p.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup> there was a very decided lull in the force of the wind and at 8 p.m. it had fallen out until only a gentle breeze was blowing. This lull did not last more than half hour, however, before the wind veered to east and then to south-east and began blowing at a velocity estimated from 60 to 70 miles per hour which continued until well into the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>. During the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> the wind veered to the south and continued to blow a gale, with heavy rain squalls, all day, decreasing somewhat in the late evening and going into southwest. This day may be said to be the end of the hurricane, although the weather continued squally on the 19<sup>th</sup>, but without any winds of very high velocity.

This hurricane was, without any question, the most severe of any storm that has ever passed over this section within the memory of any person now living, and there are people here who can remember back for a period of over 75 years. I have made careful inquiry among the old inhabitants here, and they all agree, with one accord, that no storm like this has ever visited the island....

The scene here on the 17<sup>th</sup> was wild and terrifying in the extreme. By 8 a.m. on that date the entire island was covered with water blown in from the sound, and by 11 a.m. all the land was covered to a depth of from 3 to ten feet. The tide swept over the island at a fearful rate carrying everything movable before it. There were not more than four houses on the island in which the tide did not rise to a depth of from one to four feet, and at least half of the people had to abandon their homes and property to the mercy of the wind and tide and seek the safety of their own lives with those who were fortunate enough to live on higher land.

Language is inadequate to express the conditions which prevailed all day on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The howling wind, the rushing and roaring tide and the awful sea which swept over the beach and thundered like a thousand pieces of artillery made a picture which was at once appalling and terrible and the like of which Dante's Inferno could scarcely equal.

The frightened people were grouped sometimes 40 or 50 in one house, and at times one house would have to be abandoned and they would all have to wade almost beyond their depth in order to reach another. All day this gale, tide and sea continued with a fury and persistent energy that knew no abatement, and the strain on the minds of every one was something so frightful and dejecting that it cannot be expressed.

In many houses families were huddled together in the upper portion of the building with the water several feet deep in the lower portion, not knowing what minute the house would either be blown down or swept away by the tide....

Cattle, sheep, hogs and chickens were drowned by hundreds before the very eyes of the owners, who were powerless to render any assistance on account of the rushing tide. The fright of these poor animals was terrible to see, and their cries of terror when being surrounded by the water were pitiful in the extreme.

The damage done to this place by the hurricane is, at this time difficult to estimate,... but is believed that the total loss to Hatteras alone will amount to from \$15,000 to \$20,000. The fishing business here is the principal industry from which is derived the revenue upon which the great majority live, and it may be said that this industry has for the present time been swept entirely out of existence....

A great majority of the houses on the island were badly damaged, and 5 or 6 are so badly wrecked as to be unfit for habitation and that many families are without homes, living wherever they can best find a home. The Southern Methodist church building was completely wrecked... All of the bridges and footways over the creeks and small streams were swept away.... The roadways are piled from three to ten feet high with wreckage....

The telegraph and telephone lines are both down.... It is reported that several vessels are stranded north of [Big Kinnakeet Life Saving Station]....

A large steamship foundered about one mile off Hatteras beach... and it is thought all on board were drowned....

The Diamond Shoals Light Ship which was stationed off Hatteras, broke loose from her mooring on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> and was carried southward by the gale.... This vessel will probably prove a total loss....

The damage to the instruments and property of the Bureau here was considerable.... The office building was flooded with water to the depth of about 18 inches, and the rain beat in at the roof and windows until the entire building was a mass of water....

I live about a mile from the office building and when I went home at 8 a.m. I had to wade in water which was about waist deep. I waited until about 10:30 a.m., thinking the storm would lull, but it did not do so, and at that time I started for the office.... I got about one-third of the distance and found the water about breast height, when I had to stop in a neighbor's house and rest, the strain of pushing through the water and storm having nearly exhausted my strength. I

rested there until about noon when I started again and after going a short distance further I found the water up to my shoulders.... I had to give it up again and take refuge in another neighbor's house where I had to remain until about 8 p.m. when the tide fell so that I could reach the office....

I started to the office against the advice of those who were better acquainted with the condition of the roads than I, and continued on my way until I saw that the attempt was rash and fool-hardy and that I was certain to reach low places where I would be swept off my feet and drowned.... [T]here has never been any such tide as the one here mentioned.

...The rainfall...was as heavy as I have ever seen. It fell in [a] perfect torrent and at times was so thick and in such blinding sheets that it was impossible to see across a roadway 20 feet wide.

...[E]verything went before the fury of the gale. No lives were lost at Hatteras, although many narrow escapes occurred, several families being washed out of their homes in the tide and storm. At Ocracoke and Portsmouth, 16 and 20 miles south of this station the storm is reported about the same as at Hatteras, with a corresponding damage to property. Reliable details from these places however, being lacking. A pleasure boat at Ocracoke with a party of men from Washington, N.C., was lost and a portion of the party were drowned.

There has been no communication with this place by wire or mail since the storm, and it is not known when there will be. It is therefore requested that so much of this report as may be of interest to the public be given to the Associated Press for publication in the newspaper.

Very respectfully,

S.L. Doshier

Observer, Weather Bureau