

# Salter Path - A Brief History

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*Reprinted from Judgment Land: The Story of Salter Path*

Bogue Banks is one of twenty-three barrier islands along the North Carolina coast. The island, which is approximately twenty-eight miles long, runs east to west along its length and from north to south along its narrow width. To its north lies Bogue Sound and to its south, the Atlantic Ocean. It is part of Carteret County and is partially protected from harsh winds because it lies within the lee of Cape Lookout.

The first permanent settlers began arriving on Bogue Banks in the mid-1800s. They came from Shackleford Banks, Hunting Quarters, Straits, and other Down East locations in Carteret County. There were Guthries, Goulds, Dixons, Smiths, Willises, Adamses, Salters, and Lewises. Rick Path, Bill's Point, Yellow Hill, Bell Cove, Hopey Ann Hill .... there were the names given to the small villages. Some settlers, like Elza and Annie Smith, owned their land. Others did not.

The houses were nestled among the trees on the sound side of the island. A few of the homes were built of lumber that had washed ashore in hurricanes. Other houses were built of wood obtained from the mainland. The framing of the homes were made of heart pine to which rough weather boarding was attached. The windows were covered with mosquito netting in warm weather and boarded up in cold weather. Some of the homes had been moved by boat to the banks from other settlements in the county.

The families brought their livestock with them, and the cattle roamed freely on the banks, grazing and drinking water at the various fresh water creeks. The hogs ate the wild grapes, roots and acorns supplemented by corn given them by their owners. Each family had its own distinct brand recording in the courthouse.

The settlers cultivated a variety of vegetables and supplemented their seafood, pork and beef with the meat of wildlife on the banks. They baked opossum and raccoon and stewed or fried the birds they killed. The birds killed and eaten by the settlers included the flicker (a type of woodpecker which was given the name, "yellow hammer"), the fish hawk or osprey, the cedar waxwing, the robin, the loon and various ducks.

The settlers, who had been isolated from the rest of North Carolina by the rivers and sounds, had retained an accent reminiscent of their English ancestors. The faces of the older settlers were tanned and leathered by countless hours of exposure to wind, sun and salt spray. Most of the families were related by blood or marriage, and they readily shared food and possessions with one another.

During the Civil War, these individuals reacted differently from those living in other parts of the south. They had nothing in common with the slave owners, and their isolation kept them apart from the usual grievances that the secessionists felt. With Fort Macon located at the extreme east end of Bogue Banks, the settlers were in contact with soldiers

escaping from imprisonment and with a number of unruly characters. This resulted in several encounters which the villages long remembered.

In late summer, when the mullet ran in big black schools out in the ocean, some of the settlers from the small villages on Bogue Banks would come to the beach near Salter's home. They would encircle the mullet with the long nets which had been knit so patiently by their women. Hundreds of pounds of mullet would be brought to shore. All day long, the women would split and gut the fish. The fish were placed in big baskets and taken to the ocean to be washed. The mullets were then salted down in wooden barrels and left on the beach until the boat from Hyde County would come loaded with sweet potatoes and corn. The salt mullets were traded for corn and sweet potatoes and staples.

The men got the barrels of salted fish from the sea to the sound by tying a rope around the barrel. Two men would get a long pole and put it through the rope and place the pole on their shoulders. They would carry the barrel down a path that led from the ocean to the sound. They then put the barrel of fish in their skiff and took it out to the boat from Hyde County which was anchored in deep water. Over the years, a permanent path was worn from the beach to the sound. The settlers called the path "Salter's path" because it ran by Riley Salter's home. Portion of this path can still be seen today.

In March 1896, the first permanent settlers moved to Salter Path. By then, Riley Salter had moved. The families decided to move because the area between Rice Path and Yellow Hill was being overrun by blowing sand and an excessive amount of salt spray.

The first four families to move to Salter Path were those of Rumley Willis, Henry Willis, Aloza Guthrie and Damon Guthrie. They cleared land that was located near the path named for Riley Salter. They took their houses down, brought them by sail skiff to their chosen spot, and reassembled them. Alonza Thomas of Beaufort, one of the owners of the land, gave them permission to settle there. They were to supply him with cedar posts for which they would be paid ...

By the turn of the century, the village of Salter Path, which had been settled by additional families, was distributed over eighty and three-fourths acres of land. The houses, scattered here and there, were partially hidden among the close-growing oak and yaupon trees. Due to the thickness of the vegetation, one could only catch a glimpse of light here and there put off by kerosene lamps in those few houses perched upon the sand hills. The people continued to raise livestock and gardens and to fish and hunt. By the early 1900s, well-worn paths were established through the woods from one house to another. In addition to the Salter path on the eastern end of the village, other paths were worn from individual houses to the sound and ocean ...

"If there was even a heaven on earth, it was here. There was wild country on each side of us. We had a church. We had a school. If anybody got sick, they helped out. They had a feeling for each other a love for one another ..."

—Lillian Smith Golden, 1901 - 1985, Native of Salter Path

