

Darrell Collins

Wright Brothers Monument Restoration

On December 17, 1928, 25 years after he flew the first powered flight, Orville Wright attended the placement ceremony of the cornerstone for the Wright Brothers Monument atop Big Kill Devil Hill in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. On November 19, 1932, at the dedication ceremony for the completion of the monument, Orville was the guest of honor.

Today, the granite monument at Wright Brothers National Memorial, Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina is visited by more than 500,000 people from around the world each year, who come to reflect upon and learn of the December 17, 1903-event, and the two brothers that changed the course of history forever.

Designer of the 60', Art Deco style monument was Rodgers and Poor, an architectural firm in New York City. The base of the structure is 36' x 43' and sits on a foundation shaped like a 5-point star, the same as the base of the Statue of Liberty. Sargent Granite Company of Mt. Airy, North Carolina, supplied the granite. Inscribed around the base of the Wright Brothers Monument are the stirring words, "In commemoration of the conquest of the air by the brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright conceived by genius achieved by dauntless resolution and unconquerable faith."

For 65 years, the monument has weathered hurricanes, northeastern storms, and constant salt spray from the ocean. These environmental conditions have taken a toll on the structural integrity of the monument. It suffers structural problems, deterioration of mortar joints, stained granite from interior moisture leakage, and deterioration of the electrical system of the monument.

In 1996, the National Park Service completed an Historic Structure Assessment Report to document the existing physical condition of the monument.

The First Flight Centennial Foundation, working in partnership with the NPS, raised the money to restore the Wright Brothers Monument. The restoration plans include: remove, clean and repoint all mortar joints; clean entire surfaces of granite outside and inside; update the entire electrical system and restore the rotating beacon on top of the monument; and install an HVAC system inside the structure to control a serious moisture problem.

In the spring of 1997, the restoration of the Wright Brothers Monument began. It is the first of many projects planned before the year 2003, the 100th anniversary celebration of the Wright brothers first powered flight in 1903.

Darrell Collins is a park historian at the Wright Brothers National Memorial.

Andrew A. Kling

A Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Update

The status of the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse has been the subject of debate and discussion for more than 10 years. Various proposals for its preservation have been raised, argued and postponed for lack of funds, or shelved for lack of agreement.

In 1988, the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences visited Cape Hatteras National Seashore to study the situation. They examined several options and found that, in the long term, moving the lighthouse was the most effective means of preserving the structure.

The NPS endorsed the NRC recommendations to move the lighthouse and the other historic structures in the light station complex. A Development Concept Plan (DCP) was prepared in 1989. A structural analysis of the tower was made and restoration undertaken to prepare the tower for the eventual move. Meanwhile, the beach in front of the lighthouse continued to diminish due to island migration and erosion from storms. The ocean is now within 120' of the tower.

In 1996, the State of North Carolina got involved when state senator Marc Basnight, whose district includes Cape Hatteras National Seashore, asked North Carolina State University's engineering school to reevaluate the NRC report. In early 1997, the NC State ad hoc committee agreed that moving the lighthouse was the best alternative for protection and preservation.

Planners from the NPS's Denver Service Center visited the site to analyze and update the 1989 Development Concept Plan (DCP) for the relocation. The estimated cost of this project is \$12-15 million which includes moving the lighthouse and three associated historic structures and the infrastructure at the relocation site. If funding is available in fiscal year 1998, the target date for the tower's relocation is April-May 1999. Meanwhile, the tower will need to withstand two more hurricane seasons and an additional two nor'easter seasons.

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Watch for our upcoming CRM thematic issue on lighthouse preservation, Vol. 20, No. 8, scheduled for publication this summer.