

Five Pupils and One Teacher

## 'Undercrowded' School Thrives Beside Currituck Lighthouse



Swings and other recess-time equipment get good use from the five pupils enrolled in Corolla School.



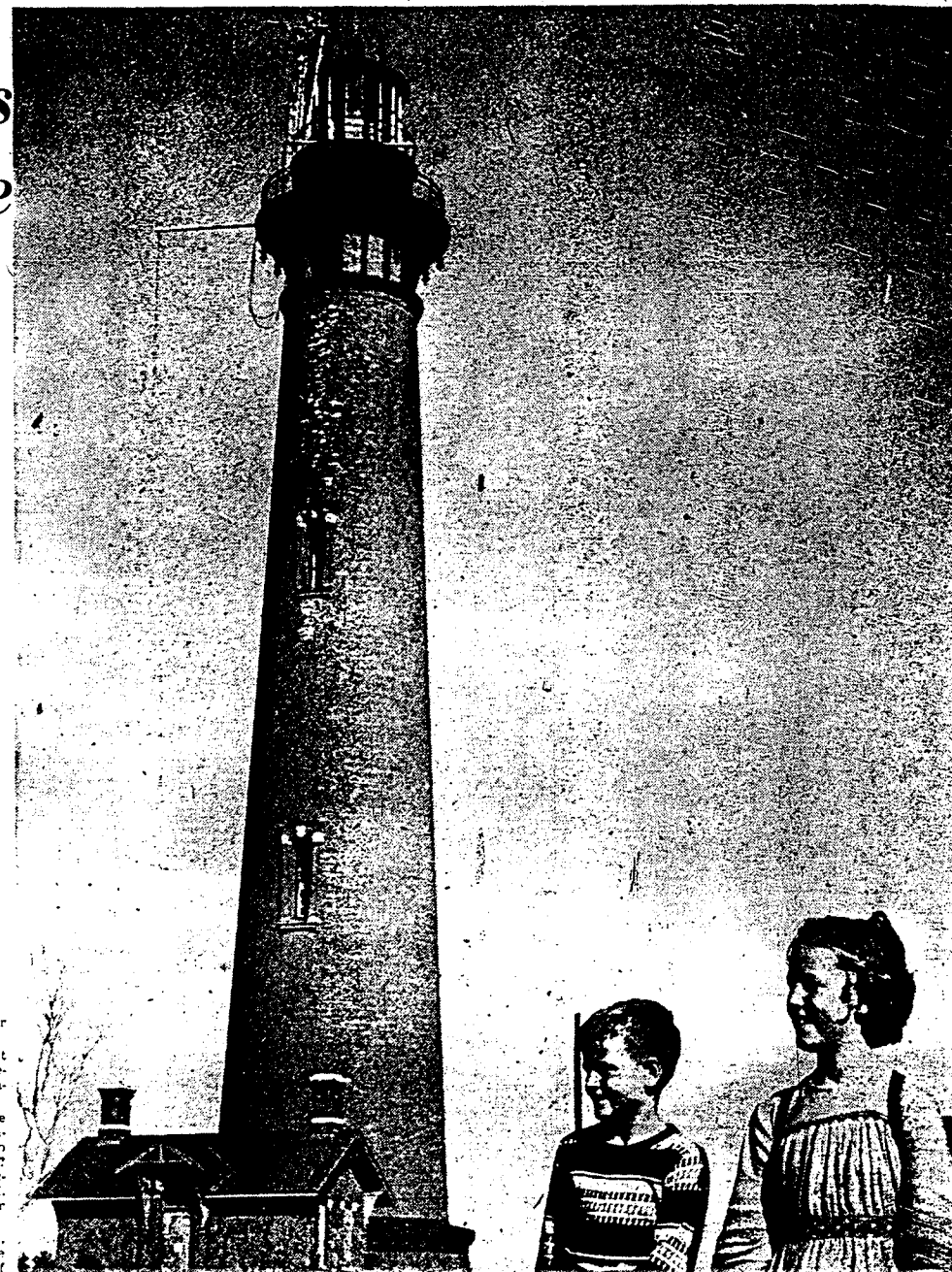
By James E. Mays

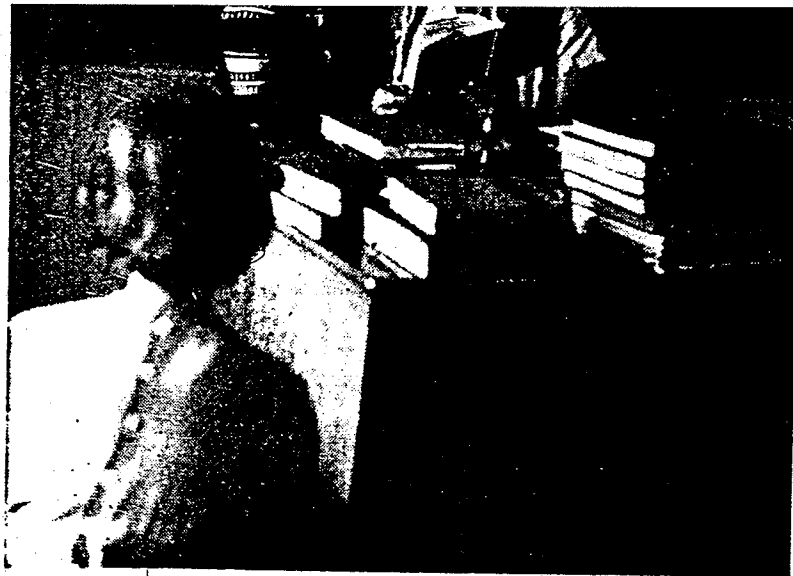
Parents, attention.  
Are you disgusted with our schools?

Are you fed up with split shifts, school construction delays and political procrastination?

Would you like to see more attention paid to teaching fundamentals, less attention to Methods (with a capital "M")? Seek no further, for your educational Utopia has been found. Fact is, it was right in your back yard all the time.

They don't call it Utopia, though. They call the place Corolla, N. C. and (miracle of





Joe Ray Simons reads his lesson for Mrs. Grace Lewark, teacher of the Corolla School. She has been in Corolla for 36 years.



Three of the Corolla School pupils ride a school "bus" from the village of Penny's Hill to the school at Corolla. Embarking for the ride home are, left to right: Cecil Midgett, seventh grade; Louise Bowden, eighth grade, and Ray Midgett, sixth grade. Driver and Corolla Postmaster John W. Austin is at right.

... spoke with just a trace of wistfulness in her voice a few days ago when she stood in the screened (against mosquitoes) doorway of Corolla's white frame schoolhouse and discussed her teaching problem.

"I'd sure like to have more pupils," she said, "especially in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. It would be easier for them to study if there were two to a class."

#### No Problem at All

From that point of view Mrs. Lewark's third grade is no problem at all. It has two members, and if a third-grade class of two members still sounds a bit small the Corollans can at least take comfort in the fact that things weren't always this way.

Time was when Corolla, now dozing remotely in the shadow of Currituck Lighthouse on the Virginia-North Carolina sand barrier reef, was a bustling hunting and fishing village. Some 27 families lived in the village then, tending their nets in the ocean at their front door and in Currituck Sound at their back door.

And in the Fall the wildfowl came... millions upon millions of ducks and geese winging their way southward along the Atlantic Flyway, stopped to feed

Wending their way past Currituck Lighthouse are Joe Ray Simons, 9, and Meta Eippert, 8, on their way to school. Both are third-graders and constitute Corolla's total school-age population.

on Currituck Sound's aquatic plants, thereby coming within range of the guns of the Corollans and the sportsmen who hired the Corollans as guides.

One thing was lacking, however.

Corolla had no school. The nearest one was several miles across the sound which presented obvious difficulties of water transportation and safety. To travel by land to the nearest school would necessitate a daily round trip of 70 miles.

So the watermen of Corolla built a school of their own.

They got a donation of land on which to build it from a wealthy sportsman, Currituck County did its part, and education, grades one through eight, came to Corolla. Parents desiring to give their children high school education sent them across the sound, boarding them in Currituck County's mainland homes.

#### Once Had 46 Pupils

At its peak, Corolla School had 46 pupils enrolled.

But the old order changed, giving place to new, and Corolla's people began to drift away to seek the greener, if illusory, fields of the mainland and the city.

Said Corolla's postmaster and school bus driver John W. Austin:

"Everything has left around here, and it's left me holding the bag."

But not quite everyone has left.

Six families remain in Corolla and the school also serves Penny's Hill, a village of 12 families eight miles up the beach.

Austin's school "bus" is a Willys station wagon with four-wheel drive, and his school bus "customers" are the three children from Penny's Hill who are of school age.

#### Beach Serves as Road

The road the bus travels is the beach itself, firm and smooth near the water's edge at low tide; tricky and requiring frequent use of the four-wheel drive when Austin makes the trip through the soft sand above the high tide mark.

"The trip takes a little over an hour, depending on the tides," said Austin.

Once the three children who come by bus from Penny's Hill are joined by the two children from Corolla who walk, Mrs. Lewark begins the day's work. She hears all classes in all subjects, 20 recitations a day, and

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Currituck County School Superintendent S. C. Chandler makes periodic trips down the beach in his jeep to talk with the teacher and children of the Corolla School.



Corolla School stands near Currituck Lighthouse on the Virginia-North Carolina sand barrier reef. Its total enrollment: five pupils. Mrs. Grace Lewark, the teacher, is third from left.

All Virginian-Pilot Photos by Mary

2-C The Virginian-Pilot and The Portsmouth Star  
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## Undercrowded Schoolhouse

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there is a certain amount of eavesdropping.

"My third graders are very interested in others' recitations," she said. "They listen to one of the others' lesson and they like to look at the lesson in the book after they have heard the recitation."

"They get a good deal out of listening in on the others."

Corolla's pupils bring their lunch to school and after lunch is eaten they may engage in a game of volleyball (their current enthusiasm) or swinging

on the playground equipment (perennial enthusiasm).

School is out at 2:30, which leaves the Penny's Hill three and the Corolla two plenty of time for such chores as they may have, plus the ever-present possibility of fishing . . . or maybe, at this time of the year, watching the waterfowl wing in from the north . . . or maybe just building castles, amid the dunes and the isolation, in the sand of the great barrier reef.

And they have the aging red brick spire of the lighthouse to watch over them and the sea.

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